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Dave Merryweather

BA Hons. Sociology and History

MA. Culture and Media

Youth, Risk and Identity

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The Open University

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Youth, Risk and Identity

In conditions of late modernity youth has become synonymous with risk. Not only are young people understood as facing an array of risks as they make their youth-to-adult transitions, they are also routinely associated with various risky practices seen to threaten either themselves or society more generally. In this context, governmental risk discourses construct young people as a risk population to be monitored and regulated. These issues have been the subject of much academic interest. Yet, questions of how young people themselves experience and understand risk, and how these are related to the local neighbourhood and social spaces that they inhabit, are rarely considered.

In this thesis I use data generated through focus groups comprising young people living in Liverpool to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between youth, risk and identity. Risk narratives were found to be patterned in different ways according to the material experiences of risk shared by young people occupying particular social and neighbourhood spaces. Narratives were informed in a range of ways by governmental youth risk discourses, but also by their own culturally related risk discourses and their understandings of age, gender, ethnicity, class and locality. Further, in discussing everyday risks, young people positioned both themselves and others in various subject positions, simultaneously expressing and reproducing a range of social distinctions and hierarchies. Understandings and experiences of risk were, in this regard, found to be closely bound up with identity.

My investigation illustrates that youth does not constitute a risk population in any simplistic way: nor do all young people experience or understand risk in the same terms. Rather, I demonstrate that experiences and understandings of risk are intricately interwoven with young people's identities. As such, my thesis contributes to extant academic knowledge by highlighting the complexity of the relationship between youth, risk and identity.

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Introduction

Youth are routinely cast as a risk population. As Sheila Henderson and her colleagues (2007:59) observe: 'young people are portrayed with a broad brush as deviant, dangerous and out of control'. This view is by no means novel and there is a long and well documented history of 'respectable fears' over 'troublesome youth' (Pearson, 1983; Muncie, 2009). Nonetheless, in recent years the locus of concern has widened beyond traditional parameters. This can be aligned with the emergence of the risk society in which many aspects of everyday life have become beset by doubt and uncertainty (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). It is within this context that politicians, media, experts in a range of fields and lay people focus their concerns on the prevention or elimination of multifarious risks associated with everyday life. The prevalence of risk as part of the human condition in late modernity has particular resonances for young people. Translated into the youth question, *all* young people are now regarded as having the potential to pose some form of risk, either to themselves or to society, and so must be kept under close scrutiny. But the increased concern also reflects the fact that in late modernity many risk practices have become a central, even *normal*, feature of youth leisure (France, 2007). Further, young people must now encounter a broad range of risks associated with, for example, educational and occupational choices, as they negotiate their way towards adulthood (Furlong

and Cartmel, 2007). As such, whether it is as risky youths, or as young people faced with uncertain, risky futures, youth and risk are inextricably linked.

Despite the ubiquity of risk as a way of framing young lives, young people's own understandings and experiences of risk are rarely heard. In this research I give a voice to young people aged 14-24 living in contemporary Liverpool. My focus is to explore how they understand and experience risk in the context of their everyday lives. This entails consideration of the materiality of youth risks, in particular how these are mapped onto Liverpool and the neighbourhood spaces that young people inhabit. But it also necessitates paying close attention to how risks are experienced and understood according to different localities and age, gender, ethnic and class positions. Related, I consider how understandings of risk contribute to processes of identity work whereby, in discussing risks, young people express and reproduce their understandings of age, gender, class and ethnic identities. In doing so, I suggest that there is a close correspondence between experiences and understandings of risk and identity.

Before outlining the broader aims and objectives of this research I begin by providing an overview of the relationship between youth and risk as conceptualised by social theorists. The social, cultural and economic changes of late modernity have engendered a number of implications for young people: in particular, today's young people are subjected to and defined by a much broader array of risks than those in earlier generations. This, in turn, has had various implications for the study of youth risks and risky youth as I now discuss.

From Moral Panics to Risky Youth

In many respects, the intensification of concern with young people and risk is no more than an extension of a long and well established preoccupation with 'troublesome youth' (Pearson, 1983; Henderson et al., 2007; Muncie, 2009). However, while notions of risk have always been central to recurrent moral panics surrounding young people (Nayak and Kelhily, 2008), traditionally it was those from particular sections of the working-class who were viewed as either engaging in practices that posed a risk to themselves or, more commonly, to society. Throughout the period of industrialisation, for instance, recurrent attempts were made to, variously, save, punish or reform 'deviant' or 'delinquent' children from within the ranks of the urban poor (Muncie, 2009). In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries numerous working-class gangs, including the *Peaky Blinders* and the *Scuttlers of Manchester*, as well as consumption practices of the working-classes more generally, such as low-brow theatre and early cinema, 'Penny Dreadful' novels and American-style pulp fiction, were all subjected to periodic moral panics (Pearson, 1983; Davies, 2009). During the post-war period, in which changing patterns of work, leisure and consumption gave rise to the birth of the teenager (Osgerby, 1997), it was working-class subcultures that were viewed as posing the greatest risk to society. As Stanley Cohen (1972) observes in his classic account of the 'moral panic', sub-groups such as Teddy Boys, Mod's and Rockers were all at some point identified by media, politicians and other 'right-thinking people' as posing a threat to societal values. Their various leisure practices, styles in clothing, tastes in music and so forth were routinely portrayed in a simplified, stereotypical manner and, ultimately, calls were made to

clamp down on their activities, leading to increased policing, arrests and even legislative change. Moral panics also ensued over other sub-sections of the working-class, such as young black 'muggers' (Hall et al., 1978), punk rockers and drug-users (Thompson, 1998).

However, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s the net of both youth practices regarded as risky, and by extension, the range of young people deemed to be either engaging in risky behaviours or posing a risk to society more generally, was widened considerably (Thompson, 1998; Henderson et al., 2007). This shift in emphases reflected the uncertainties and heightened sense of risk and anxiety associated with late modernity and an emerging risk society (Brown, 2005; Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). In a period in which an ever-increasing range of practices and populations were being defined as risky and subjected to more intrusive forms of surveillance and regulation (Castel, 1991) wide-ranging concern and anxiety was expressed over many aspects of young people's lives. This included, for example, fears of child abduction (especially in the wake of the kidnap and murder of Jamie Bulger by two young boys in Liverpool) and child abuse (following the Cleveland child abuse scandal), video nasties, urban unrest and violent crime, joyriding, heroin use, teenage mothers, unprotected sex and AIDS (Thompson, 1998; Critcher, 2003; Brown, 2005). Indeed, such was the extent of fear and concern in this period that it has been described as a 'total panic', characterised by 'a series of discourses reaching out to almost every aspect of the lives of young people' (Brown, 2005:58).

One such discourse focused on rave culture. Rave was unlike previous subcultures in that it was a mass youth cultural phenomenon encompassing tens of thousands of young people drawn from a broad spectrum of society. Rave gatherings were typically held away from the more heavily surveyed urban centres in locations such as farmers' fields, disused warehouses and airfields, and rave music and dance had a symbiotic relationship with the amphetamine, ecstasy (Thornton, 1995; McKay, 1996; Collin, 1997; Tomlinson, 1998). Rave provoked widespread public concern and was subjected to a wave of moral panics. This was due partly to uncertainties associated with the mass gathering of thousands of young people at unauthorised rave events; partly at the ability of organisers to arrange, publicise and hold raves in ways that evaded police surveillance through the use of new technologies such as mobile phones, illegal radio transmissions and mass produced flyers; and partly as a response to extensive drug-use, especially in the wake of the much publicised ecstasy-related death of the teenager Leah Betts in 1995 (Thornton, 1995; McKay, 1996; Thompson, 1998). What was significant, however, was the nature of the moral panic. The scale of rave, the fact that it encompassed young women as well as men, and its appeal to young people from across middle-England, rendered it a major source of adult anxieties (Thompson, 1998). In some respects, the media and political response followed Cohen's (1972) classic formulation of a moral panic: youth practices were identified as threatening society, police attention was directed towards preventing or breaking up illegal raves, and new legislative measures in the form of the Entertainments (Increased Penalties Act) 1990 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 were introduced to criminalise raves, including the playing outdoors of a specific form of music. What was different, however, was the sheer scale of the panic, encompassing as it did a far greater number of young people and

a much broader range of youth cultural practices than earlier panics over working-class subcultures.

The 'total panic', including the media and political response to rave, effectively saw the emergence of a new era in which, henceforth, an ever increasing array of young people's daily lives would be routinely subjected to scrutiny and regulation.

Multifarious governmental discourses now combine to construct broad swathes of young people as members of a risk population who are likely to engage in practices which threaten both themselves and society more generally (Armstrong, 2004, 2006; Smith et al., 2007; Kemshall, 2008) while ever more aspects of their everyday lives are subjected to a controlling gaze (Scruton, 2004; Crawford, 2009). Evidence of this can be found across contemporary political debates and media representations which, as I explore in Chapter Three, all too often demonise and criminalise young people through a focus on alcohol, drug-use, underage and/or unwanted sex, so-called anti-social behaviour and so forth. This concern is also reflected in criminal justice and social policy initiatives which, in both a Foucauldian and a very real sense, now employ a plethora of technologies of surveillance. Those working with young offenders, for instance, use computerised risk assessment tools which focus on childhood and teenage influences by way of preventing 'future crimes' (Webster, MacDonald and Simpson, 2006), while the dispersal powers afforded to police under the terms of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and CCTC and Mosquito devices are routinely used to drive young people out of public spaces lest they commit anti-social behaviour (Scruton, 2004; Walsh, 2008; Crawford, 2009). Similarly, social policy initiatives such as *Sure-start*, *Every Child Matters* and various family intervention programmes all have at their core a concern with preventing today's troubled children

becoming tomorrow's criminals (Mooney and Young, 2006; France, 2008; Garside, 2009).

The concern with youth and risk has, therefore, been extended well beyond its once relatively narrow parameters and it is clear that in late modernity 'concern for risky youth has become a feature of general adult anxiety surrounding young people' (Bunton et al., 2004:1).

Understanding Youth Risks and Risky Youth

While the social and cultural changes of late modernity and the risk society have induced changes in the ways young people are problematised, a parallel shift is evident with regards to how youth cultural practices are theorised. The concept of 'risk' has been more apparent in discussions of the contemporary character of youth-to-adult transitions which I discuss below. Regarding youth cultural studies, however, it is only relatively recently that the concept has been introduced and more traditionally the focus has been very much on the criminal or deviant practices of marginalised, working-class, subcultures.

Risky Youth: The American Tradition

Much research into young people and crime and deviance finds its roots in the pioneering work of sociologists based at the Chicago School in the United States. This work emerged in part as a direct challenge to the dominant paradigm of the early twentieth century which saw deviancy as a consequence of the 'storm and stress' of biological change associated with adolescence (Hall, G. S, 1905, in Kelhily, 2007). Such accounts tended to both individualise and pathologise deviancy, paying little attention to the broader social and cultural contexts in which young people were located. In contrast, Albert Cohen (1955) contended that crime and deviance arose at those points where social structure and culture came into conflict. For Cohen, in situations in which young people were unable to attain those goals valued by society more generally a situation of 'status frustration' would arise. This would lead to the emergence of gangs or deviant subcultures which were characterised by a distinctive set of values, beliefs, ways of dressing and particular practices which stood in stark contrast to those accepted and valued by society at large. Building on this, Cloward and Olin (1960) noted how the deviant practices of lower class subcultures represented a collective response to status frustration in which illegitimate means of attaining economic and social status, including crime, were valorised. In such accounts, certain acts of crime and deviancy were construed as mechanisms for purposively solving the problems of everyday life that young people from lower class backgrounds encountered.

These writers usefully highlighted how certain acts of crime and deviancy 'made sense' when seen in the context of particular social and cultural circumstances. Nonetheless, not only was there an implicit tendency to hold on to classical positivist notions of 'what' is a deviant act and 'who' is the deviant, there was also a propensity to posit a causal link between subcultural values and deviant behaviour (Baldwin et al., 1999; Muncie, 2009). As a corrective, David Matza (1964) argued that while subcultural values may explain *some* forms of crime and deviancy, they could not be seen as providing a general explanation. Instead, Matza suggested that deviancy was more sporadic, with subcultural members drifting in and out of deviant activity depending both on how 'normal' or 'deviant' practices were understood in a given situation and the individual's interactions with those around them.

Matza's insistence that definitions of deviancy were not fixed, but relative to specific context and the interactions of certain individuals provided fertile ground for symbolic interactionists keen to question traditional definitions of crime and deviance. For writers such as Becker (1963) and Lemert (1967) the issue was not one of discovering why some people engaged in deviant practices, but rather, how a practice came to be defined as deviant in the first place: who decided what or who was deviant?; whose interests were served by the application of deviant labels?; and what were the implications for the individual who was labelled as deviant? In this schema no practice or individual was deviant in and of itself; rather, definitions of deviancy were consequent upon the successful application of a deviant label. As Howard Becker (1963:9) put it in his classic formulation:

... deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender". The deviant is one to whom the label has been successfully applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.

This understanding of deviance was expanded via a focus on the 'deviant' behaviour of youth subcultures (Jones, 2009). For instance, in his account of becoming a marijuana user Howard Becker (1963) noted that such a practice was regarded as normal rather than 'deviant' within the specific context of the subculture of which it was part.

These early US studies highlighted the importance of locating youth crime and deviance within a broader social and cultural context. In doing so they were to have a hugely significant impact upon youth studies more generally. Becker and Lemert's work on labelling and the social construction of deviance informed Stan Cohen's (1972) account of the moral panic discussed above, while Albert Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin and Matza's respective research laid the foundations for a generation of studies into gangs. Much of this was, and continues to be, focused on young, disenfranchised, males from lower-class backgrounds living in America (see Young, T. et al., (2007) for a brief overview). But these early accounts also informed some work in the UK. For example, James Patrick (1973) provided a powerful insight into the territorial violence of Glasgow's gangs while, in his ethnographic investigation into young adolescents living in Liverpool, Howard Parker (1974) pointed to the close relationship between forms of crime and the structural constraints associated with living in a socially and economically deprived inner city area.

Nonetheless, important as these studies were, the emphases on the forms and practices of gangs did not, for the most part, translate easily into a British context where, until quite recently, these were far less prevalent (Young et al., 2007). As such, studies of youth in the UK established a different theoretical tradition which, while retaining a focus on similar forms of crime and deviance, offered a somewhat different explanation.

Risky Youth: The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Youth Subcultures

In what was to become known as the CCCS approach, a number of writers working in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham fused together neo-Gramscian theory with semiotic analysis to develop a highly politicised interpretation of subcultures and their practices. This approach has its origins in Phil Cohen's (1972) account of skinheads in East London. For Cohen, the skinheads' subcultural practices had to be understood in the wider context of post-war structural change. Styles of dress, tattoos, hairstyle and a proclivity for engaging in racist and homophobic violence, were all posited as exaggerated responses to the decline in white working-class community, immigration from the Commonwealth and the challenge posed to masculinity by the emergence of feminism.

Cohen's account was expanded by researchers at the CCCS. In their schema, youth subcultures were both products of a particular parent working-class culture, being rooted in specific social and economic contexts, *and* expressed resistance to dominant, that is, middle-class, values (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, 1975). Such resistance was evident in subcultural members' attempts to appropriate cultural, physical and temporal spaces for themselves and in their shared tastes and practices relating to 'dress, activities, leisure pursuits and life-style' (Clarke et al., 1975:95). In these accounts, the core elements of a subculture, such as dress codes, musical styles, language, behavioural norms, drug-use, alcohol consumption and various forms of law breaking, were not simply random assemblages; rather, they were homologous with class location and related structural inequalities (Hebdige, 1979). Viewed in these terms, the style and intensive violence of skinheads came to be viewed as 'an attempt to re-create through the 'mob' the traditional working class community' (Clarke, 1975:99); the negative attitudes held by working-class lads' towards schooling, teachers and the 'ear' oles' (pupils who embraced the ideal of educational attainment) which helped to consign them to low status jobs, articulated forms of working-class resistance to a dominant, middle-class, institution (Willis, 1977); and the confrontational styles and practices of punk constituted a spectacular and subversive challenge to the conservative values that prevailed across late-1970s' Britain (Hebdidge, 1979).

While the main emphases here lay with locating subcultural practices, including those relating to crime and deviancy, within a broader context of class antagonism, other writers at the Centre challenged what was effectively a male-centric analysis. For

Angela McRobbie and Jennie Garber (1976) young women were typically rendered invisible in these accounts of subculture. As a corrective, McRobbie and Garber developed an account of young women's youth cultural practices which highlighted the synergy between the prevailing cultural mores, which effectively confined many young women to domesticity and the private sphere of the home, and the development of a distinctively 'feminine' teeny-bopper bedroom culture. In this context, the predominant dangers faced by most young women were not those related to alcohol, drug-use or fighting, but rather those associated with the potential damage to one's sexual reputation that hanging around on streets with male subcultural members could bring.

As with the Chicago School, the CCCS retained a focus on certain forms of crime and deviance and saw these as particular responses to dominant social structures and inequalities. More recent years, however, have seen a mounting challenge to this assertion, not least because of the impact that the social, cultural and economic changes of late modernity are assumed to have had on social structures and youth cultures more generally.

Youth Risks in Late Modernity

In their respective formulations of the risk society both Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) suggest that in conditions of late modernity traditional class and gender ties have weakened and that individuals are increasingly able to 'choose between different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities' (Beck, 1992:131). Translated

into discussions of youth and risk such developments have arguably had a range of implications.

A significant development relates to the very nature of subculture itself. The close homology between class location and subcultural identity posited by the CCCS has long-since been questioned (Muggleton, 2000). However, arguably, the onset of rave in the 1980s rendered much of their approach obsolete, generating new ways of conceptualising subcultures and shifting the focus away from concerns with class-based resistance to the tastes and hedonistic pleasures of mainstream youth culture more generally (Thornton, 1995; Miles, 2000). As several writers grouped loosely under the banner of post-subcultural studies contest, rave largely transcended traditional social structures and blurred the distinctions between the mainstream and subculture. Rave was a mass culture: class was 'wilfully obfuscated' and the only barrier to membership was age (Thornton, 1995:12) while gender relations were substantially re-organised, women moving in from the margins to take centre stage (McRobbie, 1994). Rather than articulating structural inequalities or class resistance, rave was a 'taste culture' in which hierarchal distinctions, both within club culture and between ravers and outsiders, rested on the possession of subcultural capital, knowledge of which music, clothing styles, dance moves, accessories and so forth were *en vogue* at any given time (Thornton, 1995). Rave was, in this sense, premised on appearance and style, mirroring the fluid and unstable character of a society dominated increasingly by media image and consumerism (Redhead, 1993; Roberts, 1997; Bennett, A., 2000; Miles, 2000; Muggleton, 2000). But perhaps rave culture's greatest significance lay in its relationship with ecstasy. Such was the popularity of the drug that it became impossible to speak of this form of risk-taking as a minority,

subcultural activity. Indeed, rave became emblematic of a moment in which many young people, regardless of class, gender, ethnicity or sexuality, would conceive of drug-use as a normalised feature of youth leisure (France, 2007).

A related challenge posed by the social and cultural changes of late modernity lay in how risk itself was to be understood. Both the Chicago School and the CCCS focused on the deviant or criminal activities of certain working-class subcultures and posited these as responses to social marginalisation. However, post-subcultural accounts of rave opened up a space for conceptualising risk practices, especially the illegal all-night rave and the use of ecstasy, as constituting forms of hedonistic pleasure and excitement (Redhead, 1993). Attention focused on how certain risky practices could provide an, albeit temporary, escape from the harsh realities and uncertainties associated with day-to-day life in late modern Britain (Tomlinson, 1998; Miles, 2000). In a similar vein, several cultural criminologists began to suggest that crimes such as vandalism, joyriding and violence, were being committed, not as expressions of inverted social values or acts of resistance, but simply because they engendered feelings of pleasure and excitement. Jack Katz (1988 in Muncie, 2009), for example, spoke of how criminal activities such as shoplifting and robbery provided offenders with a means of overcoming the banality of everyday life. Related, Mike Presdee (2000) developed the notion of the 'carnival as crime' whereby many crimes were viewed as affording their perpetrators a degree of pleasure and excitement in a social context characterised by increased control and regulation. For instance, joyriding could be seen to provide a 'dramatic break from the boredom of being wageless and wealthless in a consumer society' (Presdee, 1994 in Presdee, 2000:49) while other,

seemingly irrational, criminal acts of destruction and violence were claimed to 'intermingle with pleasure, fun, desire and performance' (Presdee, 2000:29). Such a view was echoed by other writers who found street crime, violence and burglary to offer thrills and excitement to young men living in areas characterised by endemic unemployment (Campbell, 1993). In conditions of late modernity, therefore, risk-taking practices such as drug-use and crime were no longer necessarily associated with resistance, but as means of attaining pleasure and excitement in a world characterised by both uncertainty and increased levels of control and surveillance over young people's everyday lives.

Other social and cultural changes contributed to this growing acceptance of risk-taking as a form of youth pleasure and leisure. By the mid-1990s illegal raves were beginning to diminish as a significant event in the social calendar of the nation's youth. This was due in part to the success of its criminalisation as I discussed above, but also to the fragmentation of the rave scene into a plethora of different music and dance scenes (France, 2007). However, what emerged in place of the illegal rave was a vibrant club culture in which ecstasy continued to occupy a central role. The key difference was that the drug was now being consumed in the legitimised space of the city-centre nightclub. Risk-taking was not only becoming mainstream, it was also becoming deeply embedded within Britain's youth leisure industry.

This mainstreaming of risk-taking has been consolidated within the last decade or so. Partly as a direct challenge by the drinks industry to the prevalence of ecstasy since the 1990s, and partly as a consequence of changing youth fashions, alcohol has now become *the* central feature of the night-time leisure economy (Winlow and Hall,

2006). Nightclubs, themed bars, music venues, happy hours and cafe culture now dominate the urban youth cultural landscape (Hollands and Chatterton, 2003). As such, while drug-use remains relatively commonplace, it is alcohol that is now regarded as *the* primary risk practice associated with young people (Plant and Plant, 2006), 'binge drinking' and related social problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption having become a major aspect of young people's leisure (Nayak and Kelhily, 2008).

The social and cultural developments of the last two decades have had major implications for studies of youth and risk. Research that associate risk-taking primarily with the 'deviant' or criminalised practices of marginalised, working-class youth subcultures now seem somehow rather limited and certainly in recent years the analytical lens has been widened to incorporate young people from across the social spectrum, including those who are not immersed in the 'melodrama of subcultural life' (Miles, 2000: 3). Hence, for instance, specific consideration has been given to attitudes towards drug-use as held by young people more generally (Henderson et al., 2007; Blackman, 2009; Rassool, 2009) while attention has been directed towards the varying role that alcohol consumption plays in young people's everyday lives (Measham, 2002; Plant and Plant, 2006; Parker, 2007; Plant and Miller, 2007) and to experiences of alcohol-related violence across the UK's urban centres (Winlow and Hall, 2006). Research has also begun to look at the role of risk in the context of young people's neighbourhood based leisure practices (Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004). The role that risk-taking plays has, therefore, emerged as a key topic of investigation for social theorists interested in youth cultures.

Youth Risks and Transitions into Adulthood

While the concept of risk has entered the lexicon of youth cultural studies it would be wrong to suggest that the sole emphasis lies with risk-taking and hedonistic pleasure associated with youth cultural practices. Indeed, aligning with the onset of the 'risk society', many aspects of young people's lives are now characterised by risk and uncertainty. Of particular significance are the social and economic changes of late modernity, such as the decline in heavy industry and the rise of the service and IT sectors as well as the increased demand for a better educated and more highly skilled workforce, and their impact on young people's transitions into adulthood. Young people encounter a far greater range of risks than previous generations, such as uncertainties over educational and occupational futures, barriers to economic independency and difficulties in attaining secure and affordable housing (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007). Much of this research focuses on the continued unequal distribution of a range of structural barriers which variously promote or inhibit transition into adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; Wyn and White, 1997; Miles, 2000; Catan, 2004; Margo and Dixon, 2006). However, other research asks important questions of how young people themselves experience, understand and negotiate such risks in the context of their everyday lives (MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). In particular, researchers working collectively as part of the *Inventing Adulthoods* research project examine how experiences and understandings of risks are patterned according to gender, ethnic and class and neighbourhood locations and the different material, social, cultural and symbolic resources associated with these, and how understandings of risk change as young people make their transitions into

adult (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2011). Within the context of this research consideration is given to a broad array of risks that young people may encounter, such as those relating to education, employment, neighbourhood, relationships, parenting and health and wellbeing. But attention is also directed towards young people's experiences and understandings of other youth risks such as violent crime, alcohol and drug-use.

Accounts such as these provide an illuminating insight into the contemporary relationships between youth and risk. But they are also indicative of just how much the landscape of youth studies has changed since the pioneering work of those at the Chicago School and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Certainly, much work on young people retains a focus on crime and 'deviance'. Yet, there has been a palpable shift and 'risk', in its various guises, has become a far more salient feature in both young people's lives and social theory.

Youth, Risk and Identity

In their respective formulation of the risk society, both Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) contend that contemporary society is characterised by doubt and uncertainty. Further, in conditions of late modernity, where the old social structures have declined in significance as informants of identity, we are forced to make individualised choices in respect of how we live our lives and how we manage such doubt and uncertainty.

This echoes claims made by some post-subculturalists who maintain that youth cultural practices are shaped less by social structure, and more by individualised consumerist imperatives (Muggleton, 2000; Bennett, A., 2000; Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004).

These sorts of claims are, however, profoundly problematic. Both adherents of the risk society thesis and post-subcultural theorists typically underplay the continued importance of locality, tradition, class and community in shaping young people's practices and choices, including those related to risk (France, 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). Certainly, it is possible to identify discontinuities with the not too distant past: more young people from working-class backgrounds are able to go to university while what it means to be female has changed considerably since McRobbie and Garber's (1976) account of the bedroom culture (Aapola et al., 2005; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). Yet, as a brief illustration (and which I elaborate in subsequent chapters), risk practices such as heavy drinking and fighting remain closely bound with particular forms of working-class masculinity (Crawshaw, 2004), whereas understandings of safe and risky neighbourhood spaces continue to be refracted through a strongly gendered lens (Watt and Stenson, 1998; Seabrook and Green, 2004). Experiences and understandings of risk, in other words, continue to be enmeshed with social structures, identity and locality (Henderson et al., 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008; Thomson, 2011). The close relationship between youth, risk and identity is the central focus of this research investigation.

Research Questions

My research builds on these accounts of the relationship between youth, risk and identity, focusing specifically on young people aged 14-24 living in Liverpool. My main concern is to demonstrate how young people living in different neighbourhoods and occupying different age, gender, ethnic and class positions experience and understand risk. I consider the materiality of risk and explore young people's own culturally rooted understandings and experiences of risk, how they link with neighbourhood and position in social space, and how they help to constitute identity.

The relationship between youth, risk and identity is explored using data generated through a series of specifically designed focus groups. Focus groups were used as social contexts in which young people could discuss aspects of their everyday lives that they regarded as risky. Groups were constructed according to class and neighbourhood location, gender, ethnicity and age. This allowed for both shared material experiences of risk to be made visible and for patterns of experiences and understandings of risk which potentially reflect homologies according to the characteristics selected to come to the fore.

The risk narratives generated by focus groups were analysed utilising insights developed by practitioners working in the fields of discursive psychology and discourse analysis (Davies and Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley; 1999; Wilkinson and Kitzinger; 2003). As I show in the chapters that follow, this allowed for an analysis which demonstrates how risk narratives were informed by both the socio-economic context in which young people experienced and

encountered the materiality of risks and culturally meaningful discourses related to position in social space. Further, attention was focused on the interactive processes immanent in conversations through which individuals engage in identity work. This analysis illustrates how cultural understandings of risk were used as individuals positioned themselves and others in a range of identity positions as they discussed risk. It also elucidates how risk practices were used to classify individuals and groups, expressing and reproducing distinctions according to different positions in social space.

The approach I undertake helps to explain how and why young people variously take-up, negotiate or contest predominant governmental youth risk discourses which construct them as members of a risk population. It also illuminates the extent to which risk and risk-taking practices are informed by both the materiality of everyday life *and* position in social space and demonstrates how experiences and understandings of risk are implicated in broader processes of identity work. As such, my investigation hopes to make a significant contribution to recent research in the field of youth studies which is concerned with the complex relationships between youth, risk and identity.

Outline of Thesis Chapters

The primary focus of this research is thus twofold. Firstly, I consider how young people occupying various social and neighbourhood locations in Liverpool

understand and experience risks in different, but patterned, ways. Secondly, I explore how their meanings and experiences of risk inform their discussions in ways that have a range of implications for how they construct their age, gender, class and ethnic identities. In Chapter Two I outline the epistemological position underpinning this research investigation and provide a rationale for the methods used. I begin by indicating that definitions of youth risks and risky youth are understood in Michel Foucault's (1984) terms as products of various governmental risk discourses which are imbued with a range of power relations and cultural meanings (Castel, 1991; Kelly, 2001; Tulloch and Lupton, 2003). Definitions and understandings of youth risks and risky youth are generated by expert knowledge systems and the institutionalised practices of government, media, legal and criminal justice systems and health-care professions among others. Viewed in these terms, particular practices and populations are constructed as risks which are in need of management, regulation and surveillance.

However, as I go on to discuss, while such Foucauldian accounts help to explain the processes by which certain practices and populations are constructed as risks, less attention is paid to how young people take-up, negotiate or resist these dominant risk discourses (Lupton, 1999). Nor is due consideration given to the sheer diversity of youth and how young people occupying different social and neighbourhood locations understand and experience youth risks and risky youths in varying ways. Hence, drawing on recent work into key aspects of young people's everyday lives (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2009), I maintain that experiences and understandings of risks are intertwined with the immediate material, social and cultural contexts that young people inhabit, as well as

the culturally meaningful discourses and patterns of collective sense making that are related to these (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003, Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004; Crawshaw, 2004). Such discourses are, in turn, informed by, and related to, young people's experiences and understandings of age, gender, ethnicity and class. Further, while maintaining that definitions of risks are products of various governmental discourses, I assert that practices so defined do have a clear material dimension. For instance, alcohol consumption, drug-use, street violence and sexual behaviours - practices which form a major element of the everyday lives and leisure patterns of young people (Green and Singleton, 2006, Winlow and Hall, 2006) - have the potential to engender both physical and psychological harm: they are also distributed quite unevenly according to traditional social cleavages such as age, gender, ethnicity, class and neighbourhood (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Shildrick, Blackman and MacDonald, 2009; Shildrick, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). Youth risks are in this respect very 'real'. I consider how analysis of the relationships between youth, risk and identity must, of necessity, take these social, cultural and material aspects of risk into account.

I then discuss how, in exploring how social, cultural and material aspects of risk relate to young people living in Liverpool, I draw critically on Pierre Bourdieu's related concepts of social position, practice and distinction (Bourdieu, 1977/2010, 1984, 1990, 1994). I suggest that these are helpful in accounting for how individuals and groups occupying particular social positions are disposed to engage in particular cultural practices, including those related to risk. Avoiding Bourdieu's over-emphasis on class and his tendency to posit a unitary and overly deterministic model of the habitus, however, I illustrate how these concepts are used in a looser, less

deterministic and more pliable manner. As recent researchers observe, such an approach allows for consideration of how practices are related to other social positions, including age, gender and ethnicity (Lahire, 2001; 2003; Bennett, 2007; Bennett et al., 2009; Silva, 2010). In this respect, as Sheila Henderson and her colleagues observe (2007), drawing broadly on some of Bourdieu's ideas is helpful in exploring the material, social, cultural and symbolic resources available to young people as they negotiate transitions into adulthood. Relating this to my research, I outline how such an approach is used to explore how various risk practices are experienced and understood in different ways according to position in social space, and how they may be used as forms of symbolic capital which express and reproduce a range of social distinctions (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003; Crawshaw, 2004; Bennett et al., 2009).

Following this, I go on to outline how I conceptualise identity. Specifically, I draw on theoretical traditions which emphasise how discourses make available subject positions which individuals variously take up, negotiate or resist in and through conversational interactions (Davies and Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2003, Smithson, 2000). In the context of my research, conversations and the identity work therein are understood as being informed in a range of ways by young people's material experiences and cultural understandings of risk, and by social position. I argue that this enables the role that risk plays in conversational processes of positioning selves and others, as well as how it is used to express and reproduce a range of social distinctions, to be made evident.

Having set out my theoretical position I then outline the research methods used in my investigation. My primary aim was to explore how young people's experiences and understandings of risk were shaped by both the neighbourhood context in which everyday risks were encountered and by age, gender, ethnic and class position. To this end, I used a two-phase research strategy. In Phase 1 I mapped risks relating to young people living in Liverpool. This entailed reviewing a range of statistical data indicative of the social distribution of risk practices, exploring news media representations of youth risks and risky youth, and interviewing several professionals working with young people in Liverpool. For Phase 2, which constitutes the main part of my investigation, I conducted sixteen focus groups comprising 96 young people aged 14-24 which were encouraged to identify and discuss everyday risks. Their risk narratives were then subjected to a 'light touch' discourse analysis (Wetherell, 2007). In this second chapter I discuss how these methods of data generation and analysis were operationalised.

In Chapter Three I detail Phase 1 of my investigation. I begin by discussing how a range of governmental youth risk discourses problematise young people by defining various practices as risk and by constructing youth as a risk population to be monitored and regulated (Armstrong, 2004, 2006; Scraton, 2004; Smith et al., 2007; Crawford, 2009; Garside, 2009). My main concern is to illustrate how various news media problematise youth through a focus on specific youth practices such as crime and anti-social behaviour, alcohol consumption and related behaviours, drug-use and sexual health. I also draw attention to the ways in which news media use language to demonise and criminalise many young people. I argue that the cumulative effect of

these discursive practices is to problematise youth in ways that further justify the Government's surveillance and regulation over many aspects of their everyday lives.

I then go on to discuss how practices and populations constructed as risk are mapped onto the space of Liverpool. I examine how various youth risks are distributed according to neighbourhood and, where possible, age, gender, ethnicity and class. I illustrate this by discussing a range of statistics drawn from government and local government agencies as well as from other relevant, non-governmental, organisations. While problematic in that they are themselves products of various institutionalised practices, such statistics nonetheless serve to demonstrate how certain risks are distributed and the varying ways in which they form part of the everyday lives of young people living in Liverpool. I further develop my account of the social context of youth risks by discussing data drawn from interviews conducted with professionals working with young people in different capacities.

In Chapter Four, Youth, Risk and Age, I begin to discuss the key findings generated in Phase 2 of my investigation. This material relates to Phase 1 of my study in that the focus group discussions were informed by knowledge gathered from interviews conducted with professionals and other secondary material I investigated. Not only has risk traditionally been associated with the criminal and deviant practices of working-class youth, it has also typically been presented as something that young people eventually grow out of, although little consideration has been given to young people's own understandings of such processes. More recent structural accounts of youth and risk emphasise the persistence of social barriers inhibiting the accomplishment of an independent adulthood, though again often without listening to

young people's voices (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007). Further, the dominant tendency across much research has been to treat 'youth' as an undifferentiated age category (Miles, 2000): little consideration being given to how young people of differing ages experience and understand risk.

In this chapter I show how the young people in my study experienced and understood everyday risks in differing ways according to the age of the person. In doing so, my findings contribute to current youth studies research which illustrates how experiences and understandings of risk are complexly interwoven with processes of becoming adult (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2009). Using examples from focus group data I illustrate how young people of differing ages typically spoke of risk practices, such as encounters with other young people, alcohol consumption and drug-use, in very different ways. I further illustrate that *how* such risks were discussed informed processes of identity work, young people's experiences and understandings of risk expressing and reproducing a range of age-based distinctions. As such, understandings of risk were found to be deeply imbued with processes of youth-to-adult transition.

Gender is the focus of Chapters Five and Six. In some respects, recent years have witnessed something of a convergence in the risk-taking practices of young men and women (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; McDowell, 2009). Yet, as I found in Phase 1 of my investigation, important gender differences remain. This was echoed in Phase 2 where understandings and experiences of risk were found to be patterned according to culturally familiar understandings of femininity and masculinity. Nonetheless, the relationship between youth, risk and gender was complex and risk

narratives exhibited considerable variation depending on the material and cultural context of their everyday lives and their relation to different social positions. For instance, as I demonstrate, several of the girls and young women discussed risks in ways that worked to renegotiate or contest conventional understandings of femininity, though specific narratives varied according to different interactions of gender with age, class and ethnicity. Similarly, risk narratives generated by boys and young men were generally informed by and productive of particular forms of masculinity; but again these varied according to their respective positions in social space. In these chapters my investigation contributes to current research which indicates how experiences and understandings of risk are complexly interwoven with young people's culturally meaningful understandings of gender.

In Chapter Seven I turn attention to questions of ethnicity. Focus group data show that experiences and understandings of risk varied according to ethnic location, even where young people shared similar class or gender positions. For instance, young men and women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds typically defined risk in terms of racial harassment or assault. This was frequently translated into understandings of a racialised geography, clear distinctions being made by these young people between 'safe' black spaces and 'risky' white spaces. In this sense, understandings of risky spaces were found to be intrinsically bound up with understandings of ethnic identity. By contrast, while similar understandings of safe or risky spaces were evident in the risk narratives co-produced by white youth, this was only rarely expressed in racialised terms.

Where risk narratives were extended beyond discussions of risky spaces to incorporate other youth risk practices, clear differences were again found to be in evidence. Typically, the young black or minority ethnic youths said little of engagement with risk practices relating to alcohol, drug-use or related patterns of socialisation. Such practices were, however, clearly evident in most of the white youths' risk narratives. Indeed, judgements of these risky practices were often mobilised as forms of symbolic capital, functioning to express and reproduce ethnic distinctions.

Understandings of everyday risks were thus implicated in broader processes of identity work according to ethnicity. Again, however, patterned understandings of risk and constructions of identity varied according to specific interactions of ethnicity with gender and age. This chapter again draws attention to how the relationship between youth, risk and identity need to be located in the immediate social and cultural context in which young people are situated.

In Chapter Eight I consider social class and neighbourhood. The significance of class as an informant of youth cultural tastes and practices is widely held to have diminished (Bennett, A., 1999; 2001; Bennett, A., and Kahn-Harris, 2004; Thornton, 1995; Muggleton, 2000). Yet, as I discuss, my data indicate that class remains significant. The extent to which class mattered was found to vary according to age, ethnicity and, especially, gender. Yet, working-class and middle-class youth co-produced risk narratives that spoke of different experiences and understandings of risk. Further, risk narratives were found to be replete with the 'language of class' (Skeggs, 1997; 2005; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Lawler, 2005a) and were characterised

by class-based judgements of youth risks and risky youth. These operated to express and reproduce class distinctions. In this respect my research contributes to current research that highlights the continued saliency of class and neighbourhood location in informing young people's identities (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2009).

In the final chapter I draw together the main arguments advanced throughout my investigation. I assert that analysis of my focus group material demonstrates that understanding the relationship between youth and risk also necessitates paying detailed attention to the complex connections between risk and identity. As my data show, young people experience and understand risk in different ways according to the local socio-economic context of their neighbourhoods in which everyday risks are encountered. Further, understandings of risk are also informed by young people's localised cultural risk discourses. These, in turn, vary according to social positions of age, gender, ethnicity and class and neighbourhood. These habitual understandings of risk help account for *how* and *why* young people occupying different social locations variously identify with, negotiate or contest the problematisation of youth implicit in governmental youth risk discourses.

I discuss this, paying particular attention to how culturally embedded understandings of risk informed the various processes of identity work immanent in conversational interactions. Risks were discussed in patterned and relational ways, the young people positioning selves and others in a range of subject positions in the very process of co-producing risk narratives (Davies and Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2003, Smithson, 2000). Further,

these various understandings of risk were used as forms of symbolic capital which functioned to express and reproduce a range of identity distinctions. Distinctions were evident with respect to class position and corresponding neighbourhood location; but also, and importantly, according to age, gender and ethnicity. I also highlight that, while risk narratives were generally strongly patterned, there were occasional overlaps and dissonances (Lahire, 2001; 2003; Bennett et al., 2009) in and between social positions.

To conclude, I offer some thoughts on the wider significance of my findings, both as regards further academic research and social policy. In particular, I argue that by illuminating the complexity of the relationships between youth, risk and identity, my study makes a valuable contribution to current youth studies research.

CHAPTER TWO: YOUTH, RISK AND IDENTITY: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the epistemological position underpinning this study and discuss the methods used to address my research questions. I begin by outlining how governmental discourses construct definitions of youth risks and risky youth. I also suggest that phenomena so constructed need to be understood as having a material dimension, both in terms of their potential for harm and, importantly, their social distribution according to age, gender, ethnicity, class and neighbourhood location. Central to my investigation, I offer an account of the way governmental discourses and the materiality of risks are mediated by young people's own cultural discourses. These are, of course, informed by dominant governmental discourses and the materiality of risk, but, crucially, they are also shaped by the local social and cultural contexts in which young people's everyday lives are experienced. This approach allows for an exploration of how young people occupying different social and neighbourhood locations potentially experience and understand risk in very different ways.

I then discuss how identity is conceptualised. Drawing broadly upon poststructural accounts which see identities as constituted in the flows of language and meaning-making (Hall, 1992), I maintain that identities are products of discourses which make available multifarious subject positions in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and class.

These discourses are variously taken up, negotiated or resisted by individuals in, and through, the processes of conversational interactions. Such identity work is informed by the nature of the conversation itself: but these conversations are, in turn, influenced by participants' different subjective histories, material experiences and the cultural resources that are available to them. I also note how such processes contribute to the reproduction of distinctions between and within age, class, gender and ethnic positions, thereby informing identity work. This enables me to take my research beyond consideration of how young people occupying different social positions experience and understand risk to also examine how these contribute to identity work in important ways.

This setting out of the theoretical anchors of my investigation is followed by a discussion of the research methods used and the two-phase strategy deployed. The mapping of risks to youth living in Liverpool involves reviewing statistical data, interviews with professionals working with young people and news media. For the main part of my research, I conducted sixteen focus groups involving 96 participants aged 14-24. Focus group data were analysed using discourse analysis. I present the rationale for my use of these methods and outline how they were operationalised. I conclude the chapter by offering some critical reflections on my research design and method, anticipating the presentation of findings in the chapters that follow.

Youth, Risk and Social Position

As I noted in my introduction, recent decades have witnessed a major shift in focus as regards interest in youth risks and risky youth. Concern is no longer solely directed towards the criminal or 'deviant' practices of marginalised working-class subcultures, rather it is now extended to incorporate a variety of practices and populations such as: 1). Risks associated with youth-to-adult transitions (Catan, 2004; Margo and Dixon, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007; Thomson, 2011); 2). Practices associated with youth leisure and the night-time economy such as alcohol consumption and related violence, drug-use and sex (Plant and Plant, 1992, 2006; Measham, 2002; Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004; Hall and Winlow, 2006; Hammersley, 2008; Kelhily, 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008; Rassool, 2009); 3). Young people's health and well-being (Coleman et al., 2007; Robb, 2007); 4). Media and politicians' propensity to criminalise youth and to extend surveillance over ever-increasing aspects of their everyday lives (Scruton, 2004; Brown 2005; Mooney and Young, 2006). This proliferation in the concern over youth risks and risky youth runs in parallel with the emergence of the risk society in which many aspects of everyday life have become beset by risk, doubt and uncertainty (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Again, as I noted in the previous chapter, this is reflected in both the proliferation of media moral panics and criminal justice and social policy initiatives where concern for youth risks and risky youth has become embedded in practice.

This expansion of concern can be understood in terms of Michel Foucault's (1978, 1984/1987) related concepts of discourse and governmentality. According to such a poststructural account, discourses, which are organised by and reproduced through various institutionalised practices (Tolsen, 1996), constitute particular ways of knowing and understanding the social world: they comprise 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about - a particular topic at a particular historical moment' (Hall, S. 1992:291). A whole range of discourses are in circulation, defining what we know about, for example, gender, sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, dis/ability and mental illness. These discourses define and classify what is normal or abnormal practice as regards these identity positions: in this respect, discourses are intrinsically bound up with relations of power, constructing what we know about others *and* ourselves and placing limits on what is permissible behaviour or practice in any given social and historical context (Mills, 2003). Power is not, however, simply imposed on individuals from above; rather, for Foucault (1984/1987), individual subjects engage in a range of 'technologies of the self', working on themselves, both physically and mentally, to work themselves into the various subject positions made available through discourses.

Relating this to questions of youth and risk, recent decades have witnessed a proliferation of risk discourses which have led to numerous hazards and dangers being constructed as risky and certain groups or individuals being defined as risk populations who require greater surveillance and regulation (Donzelot, 1979; Castel, 1991; Kelly, 2001). Robert Castel (1991), in particular, suggests that the twentieth century has witnessed a discursive shift 'from dangerousness to risk', resulting in an

ever-increasing range of practices and populations being defined as risky and subjected to more intrusive forms of surveillance and regulation: this is typically less on account of what they *have* done, and more according to what they *might* do.

From this viewpoint, risk practices and risky populations are socially constructed (Lupton, 1999). They are products of expert knowledge systems and institutionalised practices which mobilise discourses that produce 'truths' about what and who constitutes a risk and, through processes of normalisation, provide guidelines for appropriate action in relation to these (Kelly 2001, Tulloch and Lupton, 2003, Green and Singleton, 2006). As such, the widening of the net of *what* or *who* constitutes a risk is part of a neo-liberal 'governmental strategy of regulatory power through which populations and individuals are monitored and managed' (Lupton, 1999:87). This is clearly evident in respect of contemporary youth who, as I demonstrate in the next chapter, are routinely constructed as a risk population whose daily lives are subjected to ever-increasing levels of surveillance and regulation (Mooney and Young, 2006; France, 2008, 2009; Garside, 2009) and who, through these discourses, are exhorted to practice various 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1984/1987; Kelly, 2001) so as to construct themselves as normal, responsible, non-risky, young people.

Such a Foucauldian approach does shed some light on the discursive processes through which certain youth practices and populations are constructed as risky. Yet, as a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between youth, risk and identity more fully, there are certain limitations. The first is simply that in asserting the primacy of discourse, less attention is paid to the potential physical, psychological or social harms associated with practices or populations constructed as risks and how

these impact upon young people's lives. Related, little attention is given to the social and cultural contexts in which practices constructed as risky are encountered. On the one hand, young people inhabit very different material conditions and their lived experiences are far from identical (Griffin, 1993; Henderson et al., 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008): this clearly applies to risk practices relating to, for example, violent crime, sexual harassment or assault, drug-use, problem drinking and so forth, all of which are unequally distributed according to traditional social cleavages and neighbourhoods (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; Shildrick, Blackman and MacDonald, 2009; Shildrick, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). On the other hand, as I observed in my introduction, recent decades have seen a proliferation of consumption practices which have some form of risk-taking at their heart: the rapid expansion in Britain's night-time leisure industries being a case in point (Winlow and Hall, 2006; France, 2007). Taking such factors into account, understanding the relationships between youth and risk necessitates paying due attention to the various materialities of risk that form part of the broader social and cultural contexts in which young people live their everyday lives.

This relates to a further point which is that poststructural accounts of youth and risk elide consideration of the broader social and cultural factors that influence how people variously take up, negotiate or even resist governmental risk discourses (Lupton, 1999). Ultimately, people's opinions about particular events, how or why they act in certain ways, or why they engage in particular practices are related to the social environments in which they live (Callewaert, 2006; Silva, 2010). Applying this to my study, young people's experiences, understandings and practices of risk are bound up with the social and cultural contexts of everyday life. Youth is far from being a

homogenised group (Griffin, 1993; Miles, 2000; Green and Singleton, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011) which shares the same understandings of risk. Rather, experiences and meanings of risk vary according to young people's own 'socially embedded and culturally meaningful discourses' (Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004:5) and their membership of different cultural and social networks and localities (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003; France, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007).

As such, understanding how young people experience and understand risks, and how they respond to dominant youth risk discourses, necessitates paying close attention to the cultural, social and material contexts in which their everyday lives are lived. In particular, consideration needs to be given to the localities that young people inhabit. Not only are different localities characterised by different risks according to their unequal material distribution, but it is locality that shapes young people's outlooks on the social world. As Sheila Henderson and her colleagues observe, 'locality forms more than a backdrop for young people's lives [it also provides] the collective context that shapes values and meanings' (2007:14). Viewed in these terms, young people's practices and understandings of risk are informed to a large degree by position in social space and the class and neighbourhood locations that they occupy (Crawshaw, 2004).

The social positions that young people inhabit are distinguished according to different practices, tastes and meanings, and by differential access to the various material, social, cultural and symbolic resources through which they encounter, make sense of, and negotiate their way through, the social world (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). These tastes, practices and resources are understood in Pierre Bourdieu's

(1984, 1990, 1994) terms as being informed by the habitus which he associates with particular positions in social space. That is to say, young people occupying similar social positions are disposed to engage in similar practices and have access to similar material, cultural and symbolic resources. Bourdieu's primary focus lies with class-based tastes and practices and how these are used to express and reproduce class distinctions. Certainly, class and locality remain important in that they continue to generate *broad patterns* of consonant tastes and practices (Bennett, T. 2007; Bennett et al., 2009) and, with specific regards to young people, continue to inform and constrain their life chances and choices (Thomson, 2011). Nonetheless, while class matters, it is important to note that, in the context of late modernity, tastes, practices and access to resources are also related to *other* social locations. This is illustrated by a number of writers who explore how various tastes and practices are informed by *gender* (Skeggs, 1997; McNay, 1999; Adkins, 2002; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Crawshaw 2004; Silva, 2006; Silva and Wright 2005; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008), *ethnicity* (Bentley, 1987; Hall, J. R. 1992; Reay, David and Ball, 2005; Bourgois and Schonberg, 2007; Connolly, Kelly and Smith, 2009), *age* (Northcote, 2006; Jarvinen and Gundlach, 2007; Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Thomson, 2011) as well as other structuring factors, such as sexuality, disability and religion, and the various intersections of these (Griffin, 1993; Pachuki et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2009, Bennett, T. 2010; Silva, 2010).

Such factors are particularly salient in researching young people, especially as encounters with, and understandings of, risks often reflect locality and class position and the various intersections with ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Thomson, 2011). Hence, for example, young women have particular understandings of dangerous

places based on real or imagined threats of male violence (Seabrook and Green, 2004); Black or Asian youth delineate risky areas from safe areas according to understandings of racialised violence (Watt and Stenson, 1998; Pain, 2001); risk practices around alcohol consumption and fighting are understood as normal in areas where these have close associations with particular forms of masculine behaviour (Canaan, 1996; Crawshaw, 2004); and teenage parenthood may be perceived as a legitimate route into adulthood in neighbourhoods where conventional avenues are foreclosed (Duncan, 2007).

Taking these factors into account, while drawing upon a number of Bourdieu's key concepts, I follow recent researchers who use his work in a much broader and looser sense and assert the significance of other social locations. Such an approach is used to explore how various risk practices are experienced and understood in different ways according to position in social and neighbourhood space and the related material, cultural and symbolic resources that young people have access to (Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007). This approach helps elucidate the existing power relations and social structures which form the backdrop to young people's everyday lives, and how these frame experiences and understandings of risks. Paying due consideration to the social, material and cultural contexts in which young people are situated also helps to account for dissonances between definitions of youth risks and risky produced through governmental risk discourses and the subjective understandings of youth risks and risky youth held by young people themselves. These concepts form an important part of this investigation into how risks relate to the everyday lives of young people living in Liverpool.

Risk and Identity

Current research into youth, risk and identity is concerned primarily with young people's lifestyles in the context of late modernity, particularly how recent social and cultural changes have impacted upon transitions into adulthood. Most prominent here is the work of several writers working collectively as part of the *Inventing Adulthoods* research project (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2011). The key focus of this research concerns how risks with the potential to encumber transitions into adulthood are encountered and negotiated. Examining the individual biographies of around 100 young people living in very different parts of England and Wales over the course of a decade, questions are asked of the role that understandings and experiences of risks play in the process of becoming adult. This includes a focus on the most typically problematised risk practices, such as violent crime, alcohol and drug-use; but it also incorporates other risks; for instance, those associated with educational choice, employment and training, relationships and health and wellbeing. Of particular interest is how experiences and understandings of such risks are demonstrated to be patterned in various ways by the different material, social, cultural and symbolic resources available according to each individual's locality and the specific intersections of class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2007, 2011). Understandings, experiences and practices of risk are, in this sense, very much bound up with identity.

In this research I adopt a different, though complimentary, focus. A central concern is to examine how young people occupying different social and neighbourhood locations

experience and understand risks in a range of different ways. However, I also demonstrate that these situated experiences and understandings of risk are brought to bear on conversational interactions in ways that have specific implications for processes of identity work; that is to say, experiences and understandings of risk also work to inform an individual's age, gender, class and ethnic identity and are used to express and reinforce social distinctions within and between these positions.

In this respect, as with risk, identity is understood in terms of both its discursive and material dimensions. Knowledge and experiences of different identity positions; for example, age, class, gender, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexuality and so forth; are organised through the flows of discourse. This includes understandings and expectations of what is deemed to be permissible for a given person to say or do at a given moment in a given context (Davies and Harré, 1990; Hall, S. 1997; Skeggs, 1997; Wetherell, 1999, 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001). Relating this to risk practices, what a person is permitted to do or say in relation to these is, as I elaborate in later chapters, very much bound up with discourses of identity. For instance, culturally embedded discourses which define normative masculinity typically associate this with practices relating to physical toughness, interest in cars or sport, drinking beer or being good at DIY (Connell, 1987, 2000; Canaan, 1996; Edley, 2001; Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2007). Conversely, normative femininity is often premised on notions of middle-class respectability (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) which have traditionally stressed the avoidance of excessive risk-taking.

In this research I consider how young people identify with, negotiate or even contest dominant risk and identity discourses. I make selective use of insights and analytical tools developed by researchers influenced in varying ways by poststructuralist thought who operate in the fields of discursive psychology and discourse analysis. I consider how identity positions are situationally produced and reproduced in the course of conversational interactions (Wetherell, 1998, 2007; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2003, Smithson, 2000), particularly, how individuals position selves (reflexive positioning) and others (interactive positioning) (Davies and Harré, 1990) in the various subject positions made available through discourses. In this respect, the discursive practices immanent in conversational interactions are performative of subject positions (Butler, 1989, 1993), constituting the psychological and social realities of individuals (Davies and Harré, 1990; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2003).

As with the concept of risk, however, there is a danger of over-emphasising discourses and discursive practices at the expense of any consideration of the social and material aspects of identity. Hence, in seeking to close the gap between the discursive (talk) and the extra-discursive (things external to talk) (Wetherell, 2001), how young people experience and understand age, class, gender, ethnicity, class and so forth, and what they regard as appropriate or inappropriate risk practices associated with these identity positions, are regarded as being 'constitutive of, and constituted in, broader social life' (Silva, 2010:181; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). That is to say, it is not just the representational practices of discourses which are significant, but also the materiality of everyday life and culturally informed understandings of

identity. Indeed, as writers working on the *Inventing Adulthoods* research project observe, young people's understandings and experiences of age, gender, class, ethnicity and so forth are, if not determined, then at least constrained and enabled by locality (Henderson et al., 2007).

Taking this into account, I maintain that the content and character of conversations in which identity work takes place are shaped by a range of extraneous factors. These include individuals' respective culturally-embedded knowledge and understandings of social structures and the roles allocated to people therein (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2007, 2011, Nayak and Kelhily, 2008) as well as by their material experiences, moral dilemmas and repertoires of cultural stereotypes (Davies and Harré, 1990). Related, these conversations are informed by various interpretative repertoires, the less monolithic and more fragmented linguistic resources that are shaped by the social and material contexts people inhabit and which provide habitual and localised guides to shared understandings of social actions, events, practices and identity (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998, 1999; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001). In other words, in discussing issues and recounting stories participants draw upon their subjective lived histories and cultural resources, and refer to practices engaged with as part of the routines of everyday life. Such broader social and material factors contribute to how subject positions are identified with, negotiated or contested in the processes of conversational interactions. They also contribute to boundary work, with interlocutors articulating cultural choices and practices in ways that affirm belonging to a particular group and indicate what it is that separates them from others (Silva and Wright, 2005). Understanding identity in these terms allows for the discursive

processes through which individuals or groups maintain, reformulate, transgress or problematise distinctions between and within different social positions to be made visible.

Linking this to my investigation, as I noted above, experiences and understandings of risks are closely associated with the different social and cultural contexts which young people inhabit. This means that understandings of risk are also implicitly bound up with struggles over power, expressing and reproducing social distinctions and relations of hierarchy and domination. As such, risk practices can be seen to function as forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Jarvinen and Gundelach, 2007) in that they may be understood in positive or negative ways according to different social positions and can be used to mark distinctions between individuals or groups. Hence, in talking about everyday risks, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, young people draw upon the different experiences and understandings of risk related to locality and age, gender, ethnic and class position and, in doing so, discuss risks in ways that contribute to processes of identity work.

Processes of identity work and the reproduction of social distinctions that occur in conversations are nevertheless far from static or consistent. The effects of differing socialising experiences (Lahire, 2001) means there is inevitably variation in how individuals are disposed towards practices and in how identity positions are understood. Even where individuals share homologous positions in social space, the complexity of their understandings and experiences of the social world means that tension, conflict, and disagreement are just as likely as harmony, consensus and agreement. Further, different conversations comprise different participants, each with

their own unique lived subjective histories, while the ways people talk typically change both between and within conversations (Edley, 2001). The cumulative effect is that conversational interactions are characterised by multiple and contradictory discursive practices, varying interpretations of these and, therefore, discontinuities in reflexive and interactive positioning (Davies and Harré, 1990). Both positioning and the reproduction of social distinctions is thus invariably fluent, dynamic and contingent; interlocutors adopting, negotiating or resisting the subject positions made available through discourse and doing boundary work according to their own point of view in a given social context. Nonetheless, as I will illustrate, understandings and experiences of risk were brought to bear on conversational interactions and, therefore, processes of identity work in ways that were clearly patterned according to social position.

Drawing upon approaches which explore how identities are constructed and reproduced in the course of conversational interactions proved immensely useful in this investigation. As I illustrate in later chapters, this helped to demonstrate how relationships between youth, risk and identity are informed by both discursive *and* social and material aspects of risk and social position. This allowed for important light to be shed on how young people occupying various social positions experienced and understood risks in different ways. It also highlighted how young people variously identified with, negotiated or contested dominant constructions of youth risks and risky youth according to the localities and social positions that they inhabit. In this respect, echoing the conclusions of those involved in the *Inventing Adulthoods* research project, young people's experiences and understandings of risk were found to be closely bound up with identity (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). However, my approach adds a further dimension to this corpus of

research by helping to elucidate the extent to which understandings and material experiences of risk inform processes of identity work immanent in conversational interactions. Risks were found to operate as symbolic resources which express and reproduce power relations and social hierarchies, not only in respect of class distinctions, but also between and within other social positions. I now discuss how the relationship between youth, risk and identity was investigated.

Research Methods

To examine the relationships between youth, risk and identity I designed a two-phase research strategy. In Phase 1 I explored the broader social context of risk of the young people taking part in the research. In Phase 2 I used a number of focus groups to explore young people's own understandings and experiences of everyday risks. My rationale for using such methods and how they were operationalised is discussed here.

Phase 1: Mapping Youth Risks

By way of contextualising the risk narratives generated by my participants, it was necessary to explore how governmental risk discourses related to Liverpool. I began by interviewing seven professionals who either worked with, or had responsibility for, young people in Liverpool. Participants were selected using purposive sampling (David and Sutton, 2004) on the basis that they would understand certain youth and

various practices as risky according to the institutional practices of their respective organisations and positions. This in turn would help elucidate the broader context of the everyday lives of young people I planned to study. Professionals interviewed included two head-teachers and a head of sixth-form drawn from separate secondary schools as well as two youth project workers based in inner-city Liverpool. These were selected as they worked with young people from a range of social backgrounds and so were able to provide insight into a range of youth risks. I also interviewed two individuals who worked with young people in the context of Liverpool's night-time leisure economy and who were hence well placed to discuss alcohol and related violence as well as drug-use; practices that are central to current representations of risky youth. This included a senior police inspector with responsibility for managing the policing of the city-centre and a manager at a popular city-centre night-club. Open-ended interviews (Silverman, 2006) orchestrated around a small number of themes summarised on interview guides (Scott, 2002) were used to generate in-depth discussions. Themes discussed included: an outline of their key role and responsibilities in relation to young people; what they considered to be the main risks associated with youth in Liverpool; and their specific role in managing such risks.

Secondly, I examined data and reports produced by various government and non-governmental organisations. This included bodies such as: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Home Office, British Crime Survey, National Health Service, Liverpool City Council Ward Profiles and CitySafe reports as well as publications and reports produced by the Northwest Public Health Observatory and the Centre for Public Health. My aim was again to illuminate the broader context of risk for the local youth. Such data are inherently problematic, not least as they are themselves

products of governmental discourses which define risk practices and risk populations in accordance with their own institutionalised conventions and practices. In this respect, they fail to account for the different ways that risk practices and populations are understood, defined and experienced by young people themselves. Nevertheless, given that governmental discourses define what or who constitutes risk in ways which have a range of implications for how young people are viewed, and, indeed, how they often view themselves, such data cannot be ignored. This is particularly so given that experiences, definitions and understandings of risk as held by both professionals and young people in this study were, as I found through my investigation, often informed by these very governmental discourses.

Also, a range of news media representations of young people and associated risk practices were reviewed. The aim was not to provide a systematic content analysis of news media representations of young people, nor to conduct a thorough discourse analysis on how governmental risk discourses construct practices as risk for certain young people; though both of these would make important contributions in developing an understanding of the relationship between youth, risk and identity. Rather, my aim was simply to further illuminate the broader context of how young people are routinely problematised via an association with a range of risk practices.

In reviewing government and non-governmental organisation reports, statistical data and media representations of youth risks and risky youth my focus was necessarily selective. Given the proliferation in the range of practices constructed as risk in recent years it was not possible to consider all related issues in detail. Hence, while

the primary purpose of Phase 1 was to illuminate the broader context of risk as it pertained to young people living in Liverpool, many of the issues considered were those identified by the professionals interviewed and, more importantly, the young people themselves. Consequently, risks associated with youth-to-adult transitions such as educational and occupational choices were omitted on account of not being discussed by professionals or young people alike, who were clearly responding to my investigation's primary concern with everyday life risks.

The ways in which governmental risk discourses map onto young people in Liverpool is discussed in the next chapter.

Phase 2: Exploring the Relationship between Youth, Risk and Identities

The use of Focus Groups

The primary research method used in my investigation was the focus group. The value of the focus group as a method in which small numbers of people discuss topics of interest identified by a researcher has been well documented (Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999; Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001; Litosseliti, 2003). My main reason for using this method was specifically that focus groups constitute relatively naturalistic social contexts characterised by processes of dynamic communicative interaction and meaning-making. In particular,

the attitudes expressed, the nature of conversational interactions, power relations, strategies for developing accounts, turn-taking, consensus-building and conflict resolution, the sharing of common experiences, the re-collection of half-forgotten memories and the exchanging of anecdotes - that is to say, the whole assortment of modes of interaction that make up routine, everyday conversations (Kitzinger 1994; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999; Myers, 1998; Wilkinson, 2004) – are often evident in focus group discussions.

Further, within focus groups both the issues discussed and the forms that interactions take are informed by factors extraneous to the conversation. In particular, the focus group constitutes a social context in which individuals sharing some social position are able to draw upon similar material experiences and relate to actual incidents in the contexts of their everyday lives (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004; Morgan, 1996, 2006). This is especially so where, as was the case for my research, groups are constructed according to some homogeneous criteria of identification (Kitzinger, 1994; Bloor et al., 2001; Wilkinson, 2004).

These features of the method were considered important given my aim to examine how young people understand and experience the materiality of risk according to different neighbourhood and social locations and how these concur with, negotiate or contest dominant youth risk discourses. The method also facilitated consideration of how groups and individuals position themselves and others in various subject positions, and produce and maintain a range of social distinctions in the course of conversational interactions.

Recruitment of Focus Group Participants

Sixteen focus groups were conducted consisting of 96 young people aged 14-24 (See Appendix 1 for full details of participants). Recruitment followed purposive sampling (Scott, 2002; David and Sutton, 2004; Schutt, 2006) from a cross-section of society so as to account for variations in experiences and understandings of risk. Permission was sought from head-teachers, youth workers and a senior academic at a local university to approach groups of young people with a view to recruiting participants. For most of the groups I was allowed to provide an overview of my aims and objectives to potential participants and request research volunteers. Those expressing an interest were subsequently provided with a letter giving further details of the research aims and outlining participants' rights as regards confidentiality and anonymity (Appendix 2). On confirming their intent to participate recruits were asked to sign a consent form and to complete an additional form identifying social characteristics such as age, gender, social class and ethnicity which were used in compiling individual focus groups (Appendix 3).¹

Individual groups were then formed so as to be somewhat homogeneous according to age, gender, class and ethnicity (Fig. 1) on the basis that this would facilitate discussion of common risk practices. Focus group discussions were held in the school, university or youth club from where participants were recruited. This was done partly in recognition of the logistical problems associated with conducting groups in other locations (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999), and partly on the grounds that I felt a

¹ In the case of focus groups 13 and 14 this also necessitated the granting of parental consent.

familiar setting would contribute to a more relaxed environment conducive to promoting in-depth discussions (Hopkins, 2007). Focus groups were conducted over a two year period between April 2006 and July 2008.

Fig. 1: Focus Group Profile

Focus Group	Age	Gender	Ethnic Group¹	NS-SEG²	Recruitment Location	No. in Group
1	19-24	Female	W-B	1-3	University	7
2	19-24	Male	W-B	1-3	University	5
3	19-24	Female	W-B	1-3	University	4
4	16-18	Female	W-B	1-3	6 th Form	6
5	16-18	Male	W-B	1-3	6 th Form	3
6	16-18	Female	W-B	4-5	Widening Participation Summer School	7
7	16-18	Male	BME	4-5	6 th Form	6
8	14-15	Male	W-B	1-3	Youth club	7
9	16-18	Male	W-B	1-3	6 th Form	9
10	16-18	Female	W-B	1-3	Youth club	8
11	14-15	Male	W-B	4-5	School	6
12	16-18	Female	W-B	4-5	6 th Form	4
13	14-15	Male	BME	4-5	School	4
14	14-15	Female	BME	4-5	School	7
15	16-18	Male	BME	4-5	6 th Form	5
16	16-18	Female	BME	4-5	6 th Form	8

1. W-B = White British, BME = Black and Minority Ethnic

2. National Statistics, Socio-Economic Group (Office for National Statistics, 2005)

Generating Focus Group Discussions

In generating focus group discussions I used an open-ended biographical approach in which participants were encouraged to discuss aspects of everyday life viewed as risky. Groups were initially divided into smaller sub-groups of two or three and these were asked to spend five minutes or so discussing activities recently engaged in which *they* considered to be in some way risky. A typical example of how discussions were instigated is as follows:

Focus Group 5:

Dave: OK, erm, before we start what I want you to do is to spend a few minutes just talking with the person next to you about, about something you've done or been involved in in the last week or so which you think was risky. This can be something you've done or somewhere you've been or anything, anything you like. Then we'll go round the table and you can feedback the examples your partner gave. Is that OK? OK you can start now.

Sub-groups then took it in turn to provide summaries of their discussions to the rest of the group. I subsequently requested participants to consider which of the examples provided they considered as being the most typical of their everyday lives. Responses formed the basis of an agenda which was used to organise further discussion. I then used a range of *ad hoc* open ended questions and responses to generate further conversation and elicit stories (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) about their experiences of the risk practices that they had identified. To exemplify, following feedback I summarised the points raised and facilitated further discussion as follows:

Focus Group 8:

Dave: Erm OK so we have got shoplifting, damage to cars, arguments with members of the family, going on the erm jumps with bikes and confrontations with other gangs that involved knives, people being tooled up, issues of police harassment, issues of hanging round and having nothing to do

Several: [laugh]

Dave: Erm, I mean which of those do you kind of consider to be most typical of your everyday lives?

Focus Group 16:

Dave: Right so it's coming down to these areas between kind of safe areas and areas where you feel more more uncomfortable yeah?

Asal: Yeah!

Dave: Right, so so in a sense, so some of you are saying that you have had experiences of kind of verbal abuse, some of you saying it's just people giving you looks or

Asal: Yeah funny looks and stuff.

Dave: Yeah? OK, so tell me a bit more about that then, I mean y'know obviously this is something that kind of really preoccupies you so wh' what do you mean by 'the look'?

This sort of approach served several purposes. In particular, it prevented me from imposing my own understandings of youth risks, participants setting their own agenda, discussing issues that reflected their own hierarchy of importance and speaking about these in their own terms (Kitzinger 1994; Wilkinson 1999). Related, this ensured participants' own subjectivised risk hierarchies were privileged (Bunton, et al., 2004), the practices discussed indexing both the material and social context of everyday life and being discussed according to their respective culturally relevant meaning-frames and interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell

1998, 2006; Edley, 2001). Further, reflecting the relatively democratic nature of the focus group method, the preliminary activity helped participants take ownership of the research process (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004), facilitating discussions characterised by the sorts of dynamic interaction, interruptions, redirections, joking, teasing, completion of each other's sentences, excitable speech, co-operation, argument and so forth that typify everyday conversations (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004).

Through such dynamic processes, both between participants and with me as moderator, each group co-produced narratives of the materiality of risk associated with their respective everyday lives. This helped to bridge the divide between the discursive and non-discursive aspects of risk and identity, and elucidated how different understandings and practices of risk varied according to the specific intersections of age, class, gender and ethnicity (Bennett et al. 2009). It also helped to produce risk narratives indicative of reflexive and interactive positioning (Harré and Davies, 1990) and of the production and reproduction of distinctions both within and between positions in social space.

Analysing Focus Group Data

My emphasis in analysing focus group data was twofold. Firstly, I wished to identify the broad patterns of understanding and collective sense-making as regards risk, particularly how these relate to the different local contexts and social positions occupied by group members. Secondly, I wanted to elucidate how participants

positioned themselves and others in various subject positions made available by discourses and how they expressed and reproduced a range of social distinctions. To this end, I was guided by the principles of discourse analyses.

There is, of course, no single, unified way of employing a discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1998; Barker and Galasinski, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Wetherell, 2001) with various approaches such as discursive psychology (Davies and Harré, 1990; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002), conversation analysis (Schlegelhoff, 1992, 1998; Wooffitt, 1993, 2001; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, C. 2003), critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b), socio-linguistics (Yates, 2001) and Foucauldian approaches (Barker, 1999; Carabine, 2001; Kelly, 2001) all varying in technique and emphasis according to their respective epistemological positions. These different approaches nonetheless share the view that conversations constitute social contexts in which various subject positions are taken up, negotiated or even resisted. As such, they afford a range of analytical techniques which can illuminate the complex relationships between youth, risk and identity. Taking this into account, I did not wholly wed myself to any single analytical tradition; rather, using these approaches as something of an analytical toolbox, I drew upon various techniques which I considered to be helpful in examining focus group data.

Focus group texts were firstly lightly transcribed (Wetherell, 2007) and then carefully scrutinised so as to highlight the various practices and events identified by the young people as being risky. These risks were then colour coded using marker pens with references to them in the transcripts being clearly indicated. This meant that

references to similar risks in all of the transcripts could easily be identified, facilitating subsequent analysis.

Having highlighted the key risks to emerge, attention was then directed towards identifying the broader patterns of intelligibility and the various interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001) through which they were understood. This entailed further scrutinising the transcripts and paying close attention to *how* risks were spoken about, looking for 'particular images, metaphors or figures of speech' (Edley, 2001) which were used to define them in particular ways. For instance, as the following extracts illustrate, risks were often constructed as activities with the potential to cause some form of harm to the person engaging in them:

Focus Group 3:

Steve: I've tried everything really like, like everything up to like crack and heroin I wouldn't touch any of that but like pills, cocaine, speed, mushrooms, acid like everything like apart from crack and heroin pretty much.

Focus Group 5:

Jon: I mean like drinking's a risk isn't it, on its own, but we went out drinking didn't we and one of our mates got really drunk and was sick all over his house

Here, risks are associated with consumption practices which the young people have engaged in and which are understood as having the potential to cause short or long term harm. On other occasions, however, it was clear from the analysis that risks were also understood as taking the form of external dangers or hazards. For instance:

Focus Group 6:

Sara: [speaking of an example of a risk event provided by Katrina]
Katrina er last week erm walked across the road like when a green
light was on so she could have been hit by a car or whatever

Focus Group 10:

Jenny: erm, erm she said that she was walking under the subway
yesterday and felt uncomfortable because there was like a man
behind her and that which felt a bit awkward and also yesterday
she was walking home and there were a group of lads walked past
her and like carrying like poles and stuff and she felt really
conscious of.

In both extracts risk is associated with a harm that might be inflicted by somebody else rather than as a practice engaged in directly by the speaker.

Having identified these two broad understandings I then worked through all transcripts, annotating whether risks were referred to as practices with a potential to cause personal harm or as a form of external threat. However, my analysis went beyond simply classifying definitions of risk to consider how experiences and understandings of these were patterned in ways that both reflected locality and social position and contributed to processes of identity work. This involved considering how various linguistic repertoires (Wooffitt, 1993, 2001) and extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986, in Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 47), words and phrases such as 'everybody', 'always' or 'all of the time', were used to express or influence understandings of certain risks. Here I paid attention to how risks were discussed in ways that constructed them as normal or abnormal aspects of everyday life, how definitions and understandings of risk reflected the age, gender, ethnicity or class of

the person, and how they were referred to in ways that worked to express and reproduce various social distinctions.

This process entailed grouping transcripts together according to similarities in age, gender, ethnicity or class and then reading across them so as to ascertain patterns of difference or similarity in how experiences and understandings of risks were expressed in talk. For instance, risk narratives produced by young men were collated and then scrutinised for similarities in how risks were discussed. This process was then repeated with transcripts produced by young women. Comparing the two sets of transcripts revealed some shared understandings across the genders such as, for example, risks being associated with external threats experienced as part of city centre nightlife. However, as the following extracts show, closer analysis to patterns of talk found that such risks were routinely discussed in quite different terms:

Focus Group 2:

John: Like if you just go to places like [night-club] in Concert Square you see people just come out of it just looking for a fight. As you said [to Robbie] it's stupid how many people drink loads, like have a few bevvies [drinks] and just want to have a fight.

Focus Group 3:

Karen: Do you know what I hate? When you're in town with friends or in town with a boyfriend or in town with all my mates and you walk passed loads of lads. It doesn't make any difference who you're with because whenever you walk passed loads of lads one will touch you.

In both accounts risk was associated with other people encountered when socialising in Liverpool city centre. However, these respective risk narratives are implicitly

gendered. The young men in Focus Group 2 speak of such risks in terms of the threats of violent confrontation posed by people who are drunk, whereas the women in Focus Group 3 see risk in terms of threats of sexual harassment. As I elaborate in Chapters Five and Six, paying close attention to shared patterns of collective sense making in this manner across the transcripts produced by young men and women respectively helped to elucidate the extent to which risks narratives were strongly patterned according to gender. A similar process whereby transcripts were collated and examined for particular patterns of understanding was also undertaken in respect of different age, ethnic and class cohorts.

A further example demonstrates how transcripts were analysed so as to show how individuals position themselves in particular identity positions and reproduce distinctions between selves and others as they talk about risks. The following is a brief exchange between me and Jackie (white, working-class, aged 16-18) about young people drinking on the street:

Focus Group 12:

Dave: Yeah, is that something that you see quite often round here - y'know, people of your age drinking on the streets and that?

Jackie: Well not necessarily our age cos they are normally younger now. When I was a bit younger I was on the streets like every weekend having a drink.

Two important points are evident in respect of how Jackie frames her response to my question. The first is how she disavows my inference that she drinks on the street by associating such a practice with people who 'are normally younger now'. The second

is how she constructs such a practice as something she *used to do*, the implication of her utterance 'when I was a bit younger' operating to reflexively position her as having become more mature. As I show in Chapter Four when considering age, analysing data in this way found such disclaimers and constructions of the risky other to be commonplace, the young people in my research routinely associating certain risks with *younger* people and/or positioning themselves as having 'grown out' of certain practices. Similar associations of certain risks with *other* young people or a disavowal of engagement in particular problematised practices through the use of disclaimers (Wetherell, 1998) were also found to express and reproduce identity positioning around gender, ethnicity and class.

This is illustrated here with one final example which is taken from the risk narrative produced by a group of young working-class women from black or ethnic minority backgrounds. Here, in discussing shared experiences of racism the young women shift their focus towards those whom they consider to be the main perpetrators:

Focus Group 16:

Sharnaz: [...] they're the people who haven't even got a good job anyway.

Raima: they're, they're on the dole and stuff

Sharnaz: they're not the people who, who are so educated

Again by paying attention to patterns of talk it can be seen how in this brief exchange the women do important identity work. In particular, by directly associating racist views with a generalised 'they', constructed here as being of lower economic status and intelligence, the women work to position themselves as respectable, morally superior, individuals. This discursive process of

expressing social distinctions, in this instance around ethnicity and class, was again evident across the narratives produced by young people occupying similar positions in social space.

My data analysis thus took the form of grouping transcripts together according to key identity characteristics. These were read through carefully with particular patterns of talk, groups of statements, disclaimers, interpretative repertoires and so forth being highlighted. These were then further examined so as to highlight how, either implicitly or explicitly, they expressed various neighbourhood and social positions and how they contributed to processes of identity work.

Such an approach to discourse analysis was productive in bridging the gap between risk and identity discourses on the one hand, and the broader material and social contexts which inform young people's experiences and understandings of risk and identity on the other. It also enabled me to identify how risk narratives variously accorded with or contested dominant governmental constructions of youth risk and risky youth according to different experiences, understandings and practices of risk as they related to the social position of the person. Finally, the approach helped to illuminate how in discussing risk, young people engaged in important identity work in a range of ways.

Reflections on the Research

As I illustrate in the chapters that follow, my investigation makes a valuable contribution to research engaged with expanding knowledge and understanding of the relationships between youth, risk and identity. Nonetheless, there are some aspects of my research design and method which require comment.

A rather obvious point concerns the broader applicability of my research. This investigation focuses on Liverpool youth. As might have been expected, risk narratives were informed by experiences and events occurring in the local context of participants' everyday lives. Related, the understandings of age and, especially, gender, ethnic and class identities which informed risk narratives were, by definition, bound up with the specific social and cultural milieu of Liverpool. It thus follows that if such research were to be conducted in other parts of the country it is unlikely that identical risk narratives would be produced. Yet, this would be to lose sight of my broader research aim; namely, to highlight the very complexity of the relationship between youth, risk and identity. If similar research were to be conducted elsewhere I would expect to find risk narratives being *broadly* patterned according to age, gender, ethnicity and class in ways akin to those I have identified here. It is also credible to assume that young people in other UK towns and cities would discuss very similar risk practices, particularly as many of the topics raised in my research accorded with those commonly found in media representations of youth risks and risky youth. However, the *specific* experiences and understandings of risk that young people would bring to the focus group context, and thereby the forms of identity work

occurring in these conversational interactions, would be intrinsically bound up with that particular local context. Indeed, this observation does not invalidate my study; rather it highlights how my investigation opens up avenues for further developing an account of the rich and multifaceted relationship between youth, risk and identity.

A further issue concerns my choice of research method. Focus groups were used to provide a social context in which young people from similar backgrounds could discuss everyday practices that *they* regarded as risky and to talk about these in their own terms. This was achieved in large part by the nature of conversational interactions which the method encourages. In this respect, focus groups proved especially useful for examining the discursive aspects of risk and identity and how these are related to the materiality of everyday life and position in social space. Nonetheless, there were some limitations to my use of focus groups. Part of this lay in the research design. For instance, some difficulties were experienced in bypassing gatekeepers in order to construct focus groups. The most frustrating instance related to an inner-city school with which I spent some eight months attempting to access potential participants. Having received numerous assurances by an apparently willing Deputy Head-teacher, I was eventually given access to two groups of 14-15 year-old boys and girls from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Groups 13 and 14). However, this was with the proviso that my contact would be limited to about half an hour for each group. As was to be expected from the nature of their 'recruitment', these groups comprised reluctant volunteers who had little investment or interest in my study. As a consequence, while some patterns of experience and understanding of risk were discussed, these narratives lacked both depth and productive

conversational interactions. As such, they were of limited value to my research as a whole, an aspect I took into account when analysing data.

In a similar instance I was somewhat more fortunate. A Head of Sixth Form at another school advised that an initial approach by me would be unlikely to elicit volunteers. As such, he insisted on forming groups on my behalf (Focus Groups 15 and 16). This again resulted in me losing control over the recruitment process. While my experiences with Focus Groups 14 and 15 had left me feeling somewhat anxious as to the likely quality of discussions, these concerns proved to be unfounded. Perhaps due to the fact that these young men and women were slightly older and therefore more confident, maybe because they were already members of close-knit peer groups, or perhaps they welcomed the opportunity to 'sound off' about their particular concerns, these proved to be two of the more engaging focus groups, each producing very rich and detailed risk narratives. However, this was more by luck than design, showing the need for researchers to retain a strong degree of control over the recruitment of research participants.

Some issues also arise with respect to the composition of my focus groups. These were designed to be homogeneous according to age, gender, ethnicity and class. The main reason for this was to enhance the possibility of accessing *shared* experiences and understandings of risk, but also as I felt that heterogeneous groups might be less inclined to talk (Myers, 1998). Certainly, for the most part, this approach proved fruitful: most of the young people were very engaged and generally worked with one another to co-produce detailed risk narratives. Indeed, that several groups discussed

risk practices which carried some potential for embarrassment or even distress was testament to how comfortable many were with the research context.

Nonetheless, my focus group dynamics were not without some difficulties. For instance, despite my best efforts in forming homogeneous groups, some did contain dissonant cases. This did not necessarily pose a problem: indeed, the presence of some difference often helped to generate rich and detailed narratives by tapping into competing experiences and understandings of risk and allowing distinctions between group members to come to the fore (Kitzinger, 1994; Silva and Wright, 2005). Yet, such cases did raise the likelihood of tension and conflict between group members. This was most noticeable in one group of middle-class males (Focus Group 9). This group included Mark, a young man living in an affluent suburb of Liverpool who occupied a higher class position than others in the group. Mark's apparent outsider status was reinforced by the fact that his experiences and understandings of risk were quite at odds with the other young men, often leading to overt disagreement and heated argument. This was an extreme example; yet it brought to my attention the need to carefully manage interactions. To this end, I tried as far as possible to ensure that *all* group members, including Mark, were included in the discussion. This included my use of moderator strategies such as direct questioning, back channel utterances and actively inviting disagreement (Myers, 1998). In this particular instance, such an approach was largely successful, helped in no small measure by Mark's tenacity in airing his views. Nonetheless, Mark's presence did highlight that dissonant cases may be marginalised or even silenced in the absence of careful group moderation.

Of course, the possibility of some participants being silenced or marginalised is not reducible to their dissonant status and my experience in conducting focus groups was that other factors can contribute to this. On the one hand, a small number of individuals were less than engaged, despite sharing social and neighbourhood space with others in their respective groups. For instance, Azim (Focus Group 15) made only a few fleeting comments while Carla (Focus Group 12) barely spoke at all, appearing to find the whole process painfully discomforting. Such silences may be due to a range of reasons: the prevalence of pre-existing power relations, fear of peer disapproval or gossip and the censure of deviation from group norms (Kitzinger, 1994; Mendes de Almeida, 1980 in Reed and Payton, 1997; Smithson, 2000; Stokes and Bergin, 2006) all potentially sidelining some voices. It is also possible that such silences were the result of differences in the positionalities of me as an older male expressing an interest in young people's risk practices, and the young people themselves (Hopkins, 2007), as well as differences in knowledge of the rules of the method (Silva and Wright, 2005). On the other hand, some individuals tended to dominate discussion (Hollander, 2004) and there were several groups where both me and other participants were clearly used as an audience for whom to perform (Myers, 1998; Smithson, 2000): the contributions by Jon (Focus Group 5) and Jonathon (Focus Group 9), for instance, were characterised by considerable boasting, bragging and showing off and play acting. In such instances, although I tried to manage discussions and ensure that all group members were able to have their say this was, perhaps somewhat inevitably given the nature of conversational interactions, not always successful.

Instances such as these raise the prospect that either some experiences or understandings of risk were *not* voiced, or that some claims around risk-taking practices were exaggerated. That is to say, the risk narratives may not have been completely accurate accounts of these groups' experiences and understandings of risk. Related to this, it is possible that in other research contexts risks may have been discussed in ways that revealed different models of gender, class and ethnic identity (Robb, 2007). As such, it is possible that alternative methods such as in-depth interviews could have proved useful to compliment the accounts given. Such an approach is certainly a valuable means of exploring how research participants live, talk and feel about aspects of their everyday lives (Redman, 2002). Indeed, in-depth interviews have been used to great effect in exploring how young people encounter, negotiate or are constrained by a range of risks as they make their transitions into adulthood (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). Further, as Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) observe in their study of young masculinities, participants who are relatively silent in focus groups may be more talkative in interview situations. However, such an emphasis on *individual* narratives would be to miss the central aim of my investigation which was to discern *shared* experiences and understandings of risk practices and to investigate how risk narratives constructed by young people occupying similar social locations informed processes of identity work. In-depth interviews may well have contributed to this. Yet, I maintain that my use of focus groups was far more productive. The key strength of my use of the focus group method was that it allowed the young people to set their own agenda and inculcated a strong sense of safety in numbers (Wilkinson, 2004) enabling them to discuss issues on which their voices are rarely heard. Certainly, in this respect it is difficult to envisage many of the young people being as candid as they were in discussing

practices such as alcohol consumption, drug-use or experiences of assault *without* the security provided by the presence of peers who shared similar experiences. The resultant risk narratives may not have been wholly accurate and, despite my best efforts, some voices *were* silenced. Yet, by no means does this undermine my investigation. The majority of young people in this study contributed to the production of rich and detailed risk narratives. Further, given the broad patterns of risk practice produced across the groups, and allowing for the fact that the focus group encourages people to share experiences and relate one another's accounts to actual events, my choice of method proved exceptionally fruitful in accessing young people's understandings and experiences of risk.

A final, though nonetheless important point, relates to how I facilitated focused discussions. As noted previously, participants were divided into pairs or smaller groups and asked to spend some time talking with one another about things that they had been involved in or had done over the last few weeks that they considered to be in some way risky. As I illustrate in the chapters that follow this helped to generate very detailed risk narratives about an array of topics. Yet, framing this preliminary activity in these terms inevitably placed certain limits on what was likely to be discussed. Current research examining youth-to-adult transitions considers how young people encounter, negotiate or are constrained by various structural risks; for example, those associated with educational choices, barriers to employment and training and moving into independent adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). Asking participants to focus on practices they had *engaged in* or things that had *happened to them*, however, effectively foreclosed consideration of such issues. In this respect, a re-working of the

preliminary activity may have helped facilitate focused discussion of such topics, thereby providing some insights into how these are experienced by young people living in Liverpool. A related point is that in eliding consideration of such structural risks no room was allowed for discussing the implications of these for young people's mental health and well-being, again a topic explored at length in other accounts of youth and risk (Henderson et al., Robb, 2007)

Further, the framing of the initial task meant that risks associated with relationships were also unlikely to be discussed. Risks relating to sex were referred to; however, this was rare and where it was raised it was very much in the context of threats of sexual assault and harassment posed by male strangers (see Chapter Five: Risk and Gender: Femininities). Other topics relating to relationships, such as asking prospective partners out on a date, negotiating new social or living arrangements, sexual intercourse, breaking-up or experiences of domestic abuse or violence were not, however, discussed here. Again, it is possible that re-framing questions may have opened up a space for discussion of these topics, although this aspect of the relationship between youth and risk may again have been better explored in individual interviews as opposed to a focus group.

On reflection, it was perhaps inevitable that the way in which I framed the initial activity produced accounts of risks primarily associated with youth culture more generally. Hence, the risks identified as being most typical in the everyday lives of the young people in this research tended to be those associated with various neighbourhood or other public spaces, such as encounters with other young people, or alcohol and drugs, with no consideration being given to a range of risks explored

elsewhere in the youth risk literature. Nonetheless, while this raises some issues for future exploration this is not to say that my research is undermined. As I discuss in later chapters, young people not only produced vivid narratives of the role that these risks occupy in their lives, but they did so in ways that illustrate how experiences, understandings and practices of particular risks are bound up with locality and position in social space. In this respect, my research design and method enabled me to produce important data which make a valuable contribution to current knowledge of the relationships between youth, risk and identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed both my theoretical approach and the research methods that I used for Phases 1 and 2 of my investigation. The approaches outlined proved valuable in investigating my research questions. In Chapters Four to Nine, I work with this approach to show how experiences and understandings of risk were bound up with identity work: not only were risk narratives informed by age, gender, ethnicity, class and local neighbourhood, they also worked to constitute identities in particular ways. Before discussing my focus group data, however, in the next chapter I discuss material researched in Phase 1 of my investigation. This illustrates the broader social and material context of risk which forms the backdrop to the everyday lives of young people in my study.

Introduction

In this chapter I map the discursive and material aspects of risk relating to contemporary youth. As a socially-constructed concept (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003), definitions of risk practice and risk populations are products of governmental risk discourses (Castel, 1991). Applying this to my investigation, I discuss how governmental risk discourses problematise youth by defining various youth practices as risky and by constructing youth as a risk population. I illustrate this with reference to media representations which problematise youth through a focus on a range of specific risk practices. While recognising that the governmental net encompasses a much broader array of youth risks, I focus here on practices which are especially prevalent in news media and which are frequently captured by statistical data, namely: crime and anti-social behaviour, alcohol consumption and drug-use and sexual health.

I follow this by outlining the discursive and material aspects of risk as they relate to Liverpool youth in particular. I discuss some key statistical indicators which illustrate the broader socio-economic conditions of Liverpool and refer to local news media representations of youth risks and risky youth as they relate to the city. I then examine the material distribution of youth risks according to position in social space. To this end, I draw on wide ranging statistical data generated by key national and local organisations. I also refer to data generated by a series of semi-structured

interviews conducted with professionals working with young people in Liverpool to show how various discursive and material aspects of risk are related in significant ways. As I show in later chapters with reference to my data, young people do not necessarily experience or understand risk according to the same terms as those generated by governmental risk discourses. Nonetheless, their experiences and understandings of risk still need to be seen within the broader social and cultural context of their everyday lives (France, 2007). As such, this chapter provides valuable information on the discursive and material space of Liverpool which forms the backdrop to my young people's risk narratives.

Governmental Risk Discourses and the Problematisation of Youth

While young people and their risky practices have long since been the subject of adult anxieties (Pearson, 1983, 2006; France, 2008; Muncie, 2009) recent years have witnessed a considerable widening of the 'youth problem', especially since the 'total panic' of the 1990s (Brown, 2005). This is consequent upon several factors. Increased concern with risk more generally (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), growing uncertainties in youth-to-adult transitions (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; 2007), an expansion in night-time leisure industries in which risk-taking in the forms of alcohol consumption and drug-use have become mainstream (Plant and Plant, 2006; Winlow and Hall, 2006) and an ingrained public perception that youth crime is on the increase, have all contributed to the prevailing sense that something is fundamentally wrong with the youth of today (Margo et al., 2006). Such concerns have fuelled, and have been fuelled by, the re-politicisation of youth crime, media and politicians of all

persuasions mobilising the spectre of 'problem youth' in the name of political expediency (Newburn, 2002; France, 2007). Consequently, the range of practices regarded as risky and the scope of young people defined as problematic risk populations have lately intensified (Armstrong, 2004, 2006; Smith, Stainton Rogers and Tucker, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Kemshall, 2008).

Definitions of youth risks and risky youth are products of governmental risk discourses. Understood in Foucauldian terms as 'systems of representation' (Hall, 1997:44) which, through their own techniques, concepts and power relations, constitute their own objects (Tolson, 1996), risk discourses construct individuals or groups as risk populations to be monitored and regulated (Lupton, 1999). Risk discourses in this respect form a key contemporary governmental strategy, simultaneously constructing populations as risky according to how they measure up to a prescribed list of abstract risk factors, and subjecting them to modes of surveillance aimed at the 'systematic predetection' of risks (Castel, 1991:288). Regarding contemporary youth, governmental risk discourses have constructed numerous practices associated with young people as risky and have subjected ever increasing numbers of youth to extensive surveillance on account of their potential riskiness (Kelly, 2001; Armstrong, 2006; France, 2008; Robb, 2007; Garside, 2009). This has, in turn, been translated into the introduction of numerous regulatory and punitive strategies (Smith, Stainton Rogers and Tucker, 2007); for instance, the extension of legal powers over young people engendered by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 and the instituting of a range of preventative polices using risk-factor analyses to prevent today's at-risk children

becoming tomorrow's youth problem (Armstrong, 2006; Case, 2006; France, 2008: Garside, 2009). Such strategies are accompanied by a series of public health campaigns directed by the National Health Service such as *Know Your Limits* (alcohol), *Sex: Worth Talking About* (sexual health) and *Talk to Frank* (drug-use and misuse).

Nonetheless, youth risk discourses are neither monolithic, nor univocal. Media, political, legal, medical, civic and other institutionalised discourses each construct the youth problem through their own forms of knowledge and practice, defining risk and problematising youth according to their own agendas. Hence, competing definitions of, for example, problematic alcohol consumption, drug-use and anti-social behaviour abound (Scruton, 2004; Mooney and Young, 2008; Ferrell et al., 2008). Nevertheless, these risk discourses engage with or compete against one another as part of a broader 'politics of representation' (Wetherell, 2001) through which youth comes to be understood as a risk population in a range of ways.

The extent of the construction of contemporary youth as a risk population is especially evident in news media. News media problematise youth according to their own institutionalised knowledges and practices, addressing different audiences and seeking to mobilise public and political agendas in particular ways through the use of different discursive practices (Wetherell, 2001). Despite such differences there are nonetheless striking similarities across news media.

Much of the news media's current preoccupation relates to youth crime. Indeed, a recent analysis of over 8,000 stories involving teenage boys from across the media found over half related to crime, including burglary or robbery, knife crime, gun crime and murders (Bawdon, 2009). The concern with crime is, of course, a mainstay of governmental youth risk discourses generally and media construction of risky youth in particular. However, albeit with some exceptions, recent years have seen recorded crimes associated with young people having either declined or stabilised (Walker et al., 2009). Yet, the national obsession with the crimes of the young (Armstrong, 2006), the media's tendency towards 'exaggeration and pessimism' in respect of law and order, and politicians' continued need to appear 'tough on crime', have led to a 'new crime', anti-social behaviour, emerging as the principal mechanism through which young people are problematised (Scruton, 2004; Walton, 2006; Mooney and Young, 2006; France, 2007; Crawford, 2009). News media have been especially strident in mobilising anti-social behaviour by way of constructing youth, particularly young males from socially disadvantaged and high crime areas, as a risk population (McDowell, 2009; Muncie, 2009).

Important in this process has been the use of language, derogatory and stereotypical labels such as 'yob', 'thug', 'feral' and 'hoodie' having become commonplace (Devlin, 2006, cited in Margo et al., 2006; Bawdon, 2009). However, given that language does not simply mediate reality but actively shapes it (Wetherell, 2001), such terms have functioned to problematise and criminalise large sections of the youth population. This has, in turn, operated to legitimise the expansion and intensification of modes of surveillance and control over an ever-increasing range of young people's activities.

Discourses generated by conservative newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* (Newton and Brynin, 2001), especially the tabloids, have been particularly negative. These routinely portray young males as a threat to society more generally and construct the 'youth problem' as symptomatic of wider social breakdown (Fig. 2.). However, left or liberal leaning newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*, and independent publications such as *The Independent* and *The Star* (ibid.), as well as liberal broadcasters such as

Fig. 2. Conservative Media: Problematising Youth (Indicative Headlines)

'Feral Britain: Thugs attack funeral car	The Daily Mail	19 th May 2005
500,000 hoodies in gangs'	The Sun	26 th May 2006
'Teen shot in drive-by attack'	The Sun	13 th April 2007
'Urban Warfare on our Streets'	The Sun	13 th July 2007
'Feral UK unmasked'	The Sun	20 th Aug' 2007
'Soaring youth violence in wake of 11		
year-old's gun death'	The Daily Mail	23 rd Aug' 2007
'A Clockwork Orange Britain'	The Daily Express	15 th Feb' 2008
'Anarchy in the UK as yobs rule'	The Sun	29 th Sept' 2009

BBC and Sky News, frequently reproduce this very same discourse in constructing youth in negative terms (Crawshaw, 2004; Mooney and Young, 2006) (Fig. 3.). Even amongst the more serious broadsheet newspapers, little attempt is made to challenge prevalent assumptions of criminal or anti-social youth, even where statistical evidence state otherwise (Mooney and Young, 2006).

The consequence of such representations is that, despite the majority of young people being law-abiding and having little involvement with criminal or anti-social behaviour, the view of youth as a risk population who lack morality and discipline and who constitute a danger to themselves and others is reinforced (Jewkes, 2004; Armstrong, 2006; France, 2009).

Fig. 3. Left and Independent Media: Problematising Youth (Indicative Headlines)

'Yobs 'making towns no-go areas'	BBC News	24 th July 2007
'Timeline of teenager killings in the capital'	The Guardian	26 th July 2007
'Britons fear rise of the yob: A spate of assaults and killings has added to the mood of a society unravelling'	The Observer	19 th Aug' 2007
'Now it's the age of the knife'	The Independent	3 rd Feb' 2008

Concerns with anti-social behaviour are augmented by a focus on alcohol consumption and drug-use. The media's concern with drug-use has to a large extent abated since the moral panics over rave culture and ecstasy in the 1990s (Thornton, 1995; Thompson, 1998; Henderson et al., 2007). Nonetheless, this risk practice remains the object of governmental discourses more broadly. Young people continue to be constructed as being at risk from drug-use and drug-users are still portrayed as the deviant other. A prime example concerns the Government's drugs strategy which is promoted by FRANK (2009), a government-funded organisation which provides 'independent advice' about drug-use to young people. A recent advert highlights the links between cocaine use and health and crime and encourages young people to seek information about the drug. Of particular interest, however, is the way in which

users of cocaine are represented. The advert depicts different individuals located in, variously, a dark basement, an unkempt bedroom and even a 'nasty toilet'. Users are portrayed as criminal (supplier), desperate or paranoid (users), or chronically addicted (individual with nose bleed). The message is clear: cocaine users are the abnormal, deviant other. Such a simplistic, one-dimensional, depiction of cocaine users is undoubtedly problematic. But it exemplifies the discursive process through which governmental discourses construct youth as risk through an emphasis on problem drug-use.

However, whereas in previous decades, governmental discourses generally and news media in particular focused on drug-use, today it is binge drinking that is the 'number one popular pleasure posing a threat to the nation' (Henderson et al., 2007:73). Alcohol consumption has become an integral part of contemporary youth lifestyles (Plant and Plant, 2006; Winlow and Hall, 2006), but it is now also one of the main practices through which youth are problematised. A proliferation in governmental youth risk discourses define 'normal' and 'abnormal' drinking patterns; concepts such as serious drinking, dangerous drinking and, especially, binge drinking, routinely being mobilised to construct particular consumption patterns and certain sections of the youth population as deviant (Hayward and Hobbs, 2007; Ferrell, Hayward and Young, 2008). Again, the news media play a pivotal role here, constructing young people as simultaneously *at risk* on account of excessive consumption and as a risk due to alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and violence.

Of particular interest here has been how news media routinely mobilise the same language used in reporting anti-social behaviour, one practice being constructed as

very much synonymous with the other. Conservative media emphasise a 'binge drinking culture', targeting the extent of alcohol consumption and its association with violence (Fig. 4.). Although the language used is a little more moderate in tone, this same discourse is again largely replicated in left and independent media (Fig.5).

Fig. 4. Conservative Media: Problematising Youth and Alcohol (Indicative Headlines)

Tabloid

'Serious risks for teenage binge drinkers: Young binge drinkers risk serious injury and damage to their health'	The Daily Mail	2 nd Feb' 2005
'Drunken yobs blamed for record violent crimes'	The Daily Mail	21 st July 2005
'Drunken yobs making town centres into no-go areas'	The Daily Mail	24 th July 2007

Broadsheet

'Disturbing youth trend: Drinking to get drunk'	The Telegraph	23 rd Sept' 2007
'Underage drinking in Britain 'among worst in the world''	The Telegraph	16 th June 2008
'Nearly a quarter of men have been injured or involved in an alcohol-fuelled fight, a survey has shown'	The Telegraph	12 th Nov' 2009

Further, while media representations problematise youth in general, a clear gendered dimension is also evident. Young men remain the principal target of problematising discourses (Robb, 2007). However, focus is also increasingly directed at young

women. Governmental risk discourses have long since problematised young women by focusing on their sexual practices, much attention being directed towards trends in sexually transmitted infections, underage sex, teenage, unplanned or unwanted

Fig. 5. Left and Independent Media: Problematising Youth and Alcohol (Indicative Headlines)

Tabloid		
'600 kids charged every week with being drunk and under-age'	The Mirror	20 th Aug' 2005
'Alcohol-related hospital admissions rocket'	The Mirror	22 nd May 2008
'50,000 binge-drink Brits end up in A&E'	The Star	2 nd Sept' 2008
'Violent truth about booze-binge Britain'	The Star	12 th Nov' 2009
Broadsheet/Broadcast News		
'Police chief blames alcohol for fuelling teenage violence'	The Independent	15 th Aug 2007
'Binge drinking fuels alcohol casualties'	The Observer	14 th Oct' 2007
'Alcohol-related hospital admissions four times higher than official figure'	BBC News	22 nd May 2008
'Hospital alcohol admissions soar'	The Guardian	22 nd July 2008
'Drink and drugs a leading cause of youth deaths'	The Guardian	11 th Sept' 2009

pregnancies (Tripp and Viner, 2005). Related, teenage pregnancy is constructed as a risk factor predictive of future problems (France, 2008). Young women are warned of

how motherhood will result in their living in relative poverty, having lower or no educational qualifications and little prospect of long-term unemployed (British Medical Association, 2003): this is despite contradictory evidence casting doubt over links and indicating that many young women have very positive experiences of motherhood (Duncan, 2007; Furstenberg, 2009). Nonetheless, not only do such risk discourses

**Fig. 6: Conservative Media: Problematising Young Women and Alcohol
(Indicative Headlines)**

Tabloid		
'Lager loutettes 'fuel pub violence''	The Daily Mail	19 th July 2004
'Drink, drugs and obesity: Britain's girls top the list'	The Daily Mail	22 nd Sep' 2004
'Brit girls are binge drinking'	The Sun	14 th Aug' 2007
'The ladettes who glorify their shameful drunken antics on Facebook'	The Daily Mail	15 th Nov' 2007
Broadsheet		
'Teenage girls drink boys under table'	Sunday Times	22 nd July 2007
'Binge-drinking blamed for rise in girl violence'	The Telegraph	15 th May 2008
'Number of 'ladette women' fined for drunk and disorderly behaviour 'rises by a third''	The Telegraph	14 th June 2009

persist, they have been intensified via a shift in focus towards alcohol consumption (Laurence, 2007). Young women's patterns of alcohol consumption are routinely condemned (Fig's. 6 and 7), media representations of the binge drinking ladette

working to construct female drinkers as a risk population. The news media typically construct young women and their risk practices through a traditional

Fig. 7: Left and Independent Media: Problematising Young Women and Alcohol (Indicative Headlines)

Tabloid		
'Peril of Booze Bingeing Girls'	The Daily Star	15 th Nov' 2008
'Booze Britain: How cheap alcohol is turning our girls into drunken hooligans'	The Mirror	7 th Apr' 2009
'Drink and casual sex ruled my life until mum took me on a shock road trip'	The Mirror	6 th Aug' 2009
Broadsheet/Broadcast News		
'On the Lash: Women are drinking more, and getting violent with it'	BBC News	8 th Dec' 2006
'Ladettes blamed for rise in violent crime'	ITN	31 st July 2008
'Binge drinking Britain: surge in women consuming harmful amounts of alcohol'	The Guardian	6 th May 2009
'Booze fuels 80% rise in female violent crime'	Sky News	22 nd Oct' 2009
'Teenage girls driven to violence by feuds, drink and jealousy'	The Observer	22 nd Nov' 2009

conceptualisation of middle-class femininity (Skeggs, 1997: Green and Singleton, 2006), practices such as excessive alcohol consumption being mobilised as a delegitimised symbolic marker of respectability. Indeed, young women are now routinely scrutinised for evidence of transgressions of respectable femininity: not only is widespread concern expressed over their alcohol consumption, but familiar images

of their being at risk of alcohol or drug-related deaths or of falling prey to sexual assault are continuously reiterated (Henderson et al., 2007). Even beyond news media, make-over programmes such as *Snog, Marry, Avoid* and *Ladette to Lady* typically chastise inappropriate conduct, demeanour and style (McRobbie, 2009) with the aim of 'correcting' transgressions of respectable femininity.

While frequently speaking with different voices, media representations of youth ultimately complement one another, constructing youth in similar terms, supporting the same strategy and sharing common institutional, administrative or political patterns (Cousins and Hussain, 1984 cited by Hall, S. 1997). The cumulative effect has been the emergence of a 'general adult anxiety surrounding young people' (Bunton et al., 2004:1). This is evidenced in the scale and frequency of moral panics around youth and their risk practices (Thompson, 1998; France, 2007) and an increased fear of, and resentment towards, young people more generally (Margo et al., 2006).

The various governmental youth risk discourses in circulation, including those produced through media, operate to problematise young people, legitimatising the expansion of a wide range of techniques of surveillance and regulation. At the same time, they also seek to construct young people as 'individually responsible for their own conduct, life choices and options' (Kelly, 2001:30), exhorting them to practice various 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1984) through which they take up positions as normal, acceptable, young people. However, how young people understand and experience such risks are, in part at least, influenced by the socio-

economic and cultural context in which they live (France, 2007). I now consider this further, examining how youth risks are mapped onto the space of the city of Liverpool.

Liverpool and the Materiality of Risk: An Overview.

In this section I discuss the socio-economic context which forms the backdrop to the everyday lives of young people in Liverpool. I also consider the materiality of a number of youth risk practices as evidenced by a range of statistical evidence. This is augmented by incorporation of the views of several professionals working with young people who I interviewed by way of further contextualising youth risks and risky youth.

The socio-economic context

Located in the north-west of England, Liverpool is a medium sized city which, following decades of socio-economic decline, is in the throes of a renaissance. No longer heavily reliant on the traditional working-class industries of shipping, dockyards and industrial production, the city has undergone a marked increase in the service sector economy and has seen a massive expansion of its leisure economy. Investment and urban regeneration have transformed many parts of the city centre, while the award of European Capital of Culture status for 2008 generated a major tourist boom, bringing further jobs and stimulating additional investment to the city.

This repositioning has been accompanied by changes in social structure. For example, while the city was once based primarily around manual unskilled or semi-skilled labour, recent census data on Approximated Social Grade categorise 41% of the population as either *A*, *B*, or *C1* and 59% as *C2* or below (Office for National Statistics, 2001). Judged against these criteria, the socio-economic position of Liverpool has improved markedly in recent decades.

Yet in terms of several key socio-economic indicators, Liverpool continues to lag behind many other regions across the nation (Fig. 8.). Further, the Index of Multiple

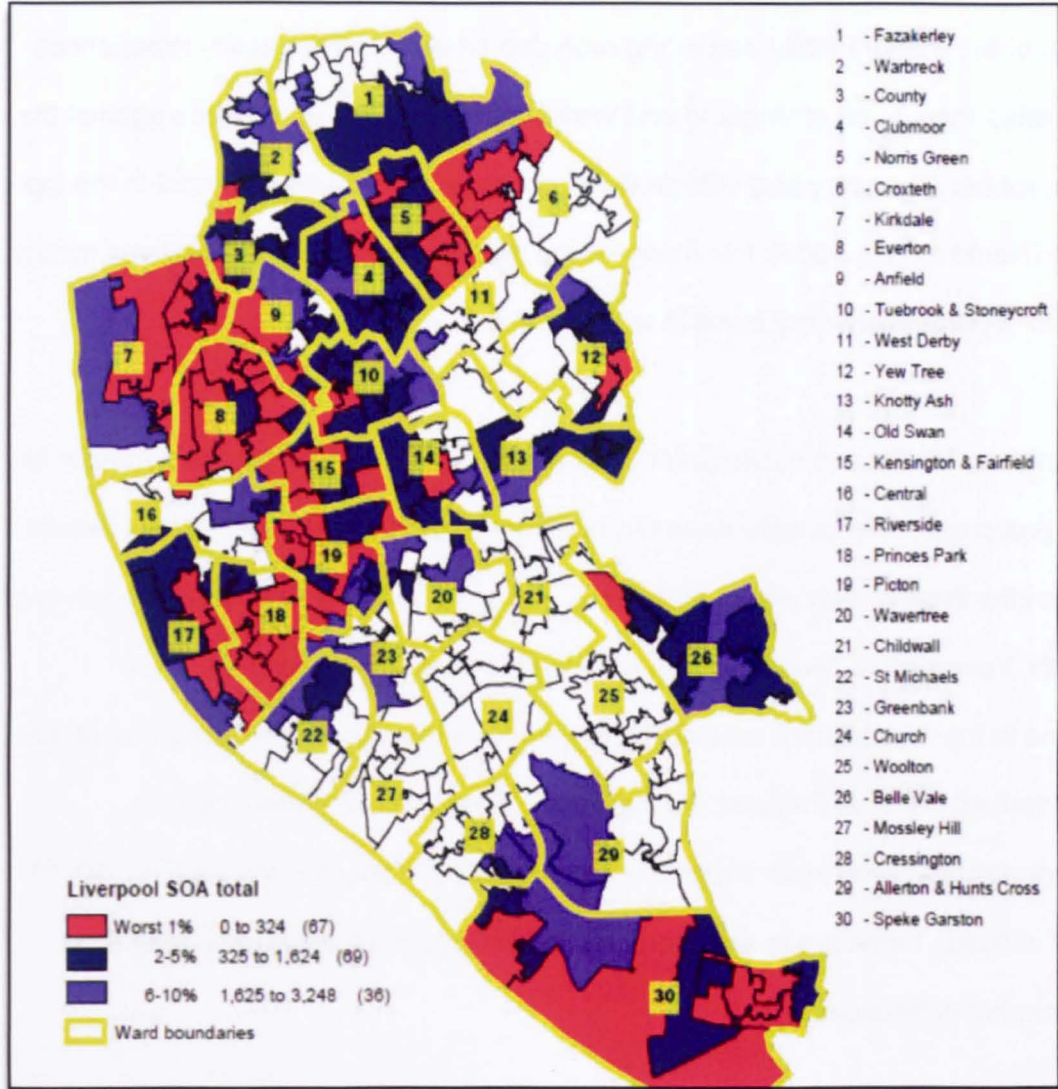
Fig.8. Liverpool: Key Economic Indicators

- Average Household Net Income is less than £230 per week – the sixth lowest town or city in the UK;
- In 2009 24% (69,070) of the city's population were classed as 'workless', significantly higher than the rate of 13% for Great Britain as a whole;
- In 2009 61% of people of working age were in employment, well below the national figure of 74%;
- In May 2009 8% of working age population were unemployed – well above the national average of 4%

(Sources: Office for National Statistics, 2001; 2005; Parkinson et al., 2005; City of Liverpool, 2009).

Deprivation, which combines data relating to employment, education, health, skills and training, barriers to housing and services and crime into an overall measure of deprivation, locates many parts of the city amongst the most deprived nationally (Fig. 9). In this respect, much of Liverpool's population continues to experience

Fig. 9. Map of Liverpool: Index of Multiple Deprivation.



(Source: City of Liverpool, 2009).²

relatively high levels of deprivation, evident in inferior accommodation and greater levels of under and/or unemployment. Standards of health are also generally poorer than many other parts of the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2005; Parkinson et al., 2005), while health-related risk-taking practices such as alcohol consumption and

² The ONS Index of Multiple Deprivation uses data based on Lower Layer Super Output Areas (SOAs). These provide detailed information about a relatively small population (ave. 1500 residents) which are socially homogeneous (Office for National Statistics, ND)

smoking are also commonplace (North West Public Health Observatory, 2002; Deacon et al., 2008). Finally, regarding recorded crime Liverpool again experiences higher rates than much of England and Wales, offences such as violence against the person, robbery, burglary and vehicle thefts consistently locating Liverpool in the top quintile (Home Office, 2009). For many young people such material conditions render Liverpool a particularly risky place in which to live.

Of course, as I explain in subsequent chapters, this materiality is not the same for all. Focus group participants were drawn from different parts of Liverpool. White, middle-class youths lived in relatively affluent parts of the city, namely Childwall, Allerton and Aigburth. Young white, working-class males and females were recruited from locations in the less affluent areas of Speke and Walton, the former being one of the most deprived areas in England. Young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds also lived in an especially deprived area, Princes Park. As Figs. 10, 11 and 12 indicate, these areas are characterised by important socio-economic and demographic differences.

Fig.10. Neighbourhood Profile: Allerton¹, Childwall, Mossley Hill (inc. Aigburth).

Middle-class areas characterised by:

- Below Average levels of multiple deprivation, all ranked in the 60-69% range nationally (where 1% is the most deprived and 100% is the least deprived);
- High density white populations – 6%, 6% and 7% Black or Minority Ethnic populations;
- Recorded crime rates of 100, 79 and 66 per 1000 population;
- Low rates of worklessness – 14%, 10% and 9% (2008 figures);
- High percentage of young people leaving school with 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades – 72%, 81% and 84%. This is against a city average of 65% (2008 figures).

(Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2007; City of Liverpool, 2009)

¹. Allerton incorporates Hunts Cross, an area with a shopping area and a number of trading and business estates. This explains the slight anomaly in terms of figures for recorded crime compared to other middle-class areas

Fig.11. Neighbourhood Profile: Speke-Garston and County (inc. Walton)

Working class areas characterised by:

- High levels of multiple deprivation, ranked in the most deprived 5% nationally;
- High density white populations – 4% and 3% Black or Minority Ethnic populations;
- Recorded crime rates of 221 and 179 per 1000 population, more than double the rate for Liverpool;
- High rates of worklessness – 31% and 30% (2008 figures);
- Low percentage of young people leaving school with 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades – 45% and 56% against a city average of 65% (2008 figures).

(Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2007; City of Liverpool, 2009)

Fig.12. Neighbourhood Profile: Princes Park (inc. Toxteth)

Working-class area characterised by:

- Very High levels of multiple deprivation, ranked in the most deprived 1% nationally;
- Highest density non-white population in Liverpool - 38% as against 8% as a whole;
- Recorded crime rate of 152 per 1000 pop. more than double that of Liverpool;
- Second highest rate of worklessness in the city – 39% of the population (2008 figures);
- Lowest percentage of young people leaving school with 5 or more A*-C GCSE grades - 45% against a city average of 65% (2008 figures).

(Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2007; City of Liverpool, 2009)

Youth Risks and Risky Youth in Liverpool

The more general risk context is augmented by the extent of an array of youth risk practices. Statistical data generated through the institutionalised practices of various governmental agencies constructs Liverpool youth as an especially risky population. I discuss this here with reference to crime and anti-social behaviour, racially-motivated violence, alcohol consumption and associated behaviours, drug-use and sexual health. I begin the section with a brief discussion of how local media construct the Liverpool youth 'problem'.

Local Media and Risky Youth

Governmental youth risk discourses and media representations of Liverpool youth reflect the national picture inasmuch as they routinely construct young people as a risk population. As with media more generally, a range of derogatory and stereotypical terms of reference are frequently used in reporting the practices of certain sections of the youth population (Fig. 13). Such terms not only work to problematise young people, they also reiterate the familiar themes that certain risk practices are widespread and that youth are out of control. However, as is the case nationally, the relationship between young people and risk is far more complex than such representations often suggest.

Fig. 13: Local Media and the Problematisation of Liverpool Youth (Indicative Headlines)

'We've got to end the terror of yobs with dogs on street'	Liverpool Echo	10 th July 2006
'Families meet cops in bid to end teen gun wars/ yobs' rogues gallery'	Liverpool Echo	15 th Sept' 2006
'Women in top yobs list: Merseyside is third worst region for yobbish behaviour in young women, figures show'	Liverpool Echo	8 th May 2007
'We'll kick the gangs of yobs out of your parks'	Liverpool Echo	18 th July 2007
'Liverpool worst in England for binge drinking'	Daily Post	19 th Oct' 2007

Crime and Anti-social Behaviour

Reflecting national trends, many crimes associated with youth in Liverpool have either declined or stabilised in recent years (Fig.14.). Yet governmental youth risk discourses continue to construct youth crime as a major social problem. In this respect, as noted above, the concept of anti-social behaviour has become especially significant in problematising youth, particularly young males from socially disadvantaged areas (Armstrong, 2006; France, 2008; Garside, 2009; Muncie, 2009).

Fig.14. Recorded Crime in Liverpool, 2007/08, and percentage change from 2006/07

Crime by type	No. of offences	% change
Serious violence	545	-27
- of which were Section 18 wounding	444	
Injury violence	3337	-25
- of which involved knives	167	n/a
Gun crime offences	183	n/a
Personal robbery	820	-27
Drug offences	7030	+37

(Source: Liverpool City Council Citysafe, 2008).

Liverpool youth are problematised in respect of crime and anti-social behaviour through the institutionalised technologies and practices of Liverpool City Council's Citysafe. Citysafe comprises the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and

Alcohol Action Team³ and has responsibility for measuring the extent of crime and anti-social behaviour in Liverpool as well as for developing, and monitoring the effectiveness of, strategies aimed at managing those youth considered most likely to engage in such risk practices.

Data produced by Citysafe suggest anti-social behaviour is extensive, the period 2007/08 seeing 37,390 incidents reported to Police and 1,162 to the Liverpool Anti Social Behavioural Unit. The majority of these reported incidents involved young people (Liverpool City Council, 2008). Further, reflecting Walker et al's., (2009) observation that perceptions of anti-social behaviour are generally greater in areas with high levels of deprivation, many residents in Liverpool view teenagers hanging around, people dealing drugs, and vandalism as 'very' or 'fairly big' problems within their neighbourhood (Liverpool City Council, 2008).

Given the problematic definition of anti-social behaviour (Scruton, 2004), it is difficult to discern whether such statistics reflect a genuine social problem or are more indicative of a lowering of tolerance levels generated by current youth risk discourses which have 'defined deviancy up' (Mooney and Young, 2006:398), criminalising a range of previously tolerated practices. Further, institutionalised knowledges and practices drive organisations such as Citysafe to continually generate statistics in order to evidence the 'problem'; but the more statistics are collected, the bigger the problem is seen to be (Mooney and Young, 2006). Such problems notwithstanding,

³ Liverpool Citysafe is a partnership scheme comprising a range of agencies including Liverpool City Council, Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire Service, Health, Merseytravel, National Probation Service, University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University, local businesses and communities (Liverpool City Council, 2005).

data as it exists construct Liverpool youth as a risk population likely to encounter or engage in behaviour perceived to be anti-social.

A further important aspect of governmental discourses around crime and anti-social behaviour has been the construction of black male youth as a risk population. Much recent media focus has been on a perceived increase in violent crime, particularly that involving knives; though the concern with black youth is yet to reach the heights witnessed in the 1970's moral panics around mugging (Hall, S. et al., 1978).

However, much recent focus is directed towards young people in London and local governmental discourses have tended to construct black or minority ethnic youth as being at risk of hate crime, especially since the murder of Anthony Walker in 2005. Subsequently, organisations such as Citysafe and Merseyside Police have focused on tackling hate crime, including those that are racially-motivated. At the material level this is evidenced in the number of recorded incidents of racially motivated hate crime offences, the period 2007/08 seeing a reduction on the previous year with 698 offences. Of these, the most common were racially aggravated intentional harassment (22%) and racially or religiously aggravated actual bodily harm (8%) (Liverpool City Council, 2008). Data here then suggest a reduced risk of racially motivated crime, although given such crimes and more general racism and harassment often go unreported, the actual extent of this is unclear.

Drug-use, Alcohol Consumption and Alcohol-Related Violence

While drug-use has become a relatively normal, and for many young people, a non-problematic, feature of youth culture (Thornton, 1995; France, 2007; Blackman, 2009; Muncie, 2009) it continues to be a key risk practice through which youth are problematised. Certainly at a material level, drug-use can and does pose risks of harm. Not only is drug-use associated with a range of both short and long term health problems, it is also related with other risk behaviours such as offending and alcohol consumption (Liverpool City Council, 2008; Hoare, 2009). Data generated by health agencies construct drug-use as especially problematic in the UK; reported usage of amphetamine, cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy all being higher than any other European Union state (North West Public Health Observatory, 2009). Nonetheless, recent data indicate declining levels of drug-use (Davies et al., 2009; Hoare, 2009), a trend especially evident with regard to young people (Fig.15.).

Fig.15. Young People Aged 16-24: Extent and Trends in Drug-use – 2008/09

- 43% report having ever used illicit drugs
- 23% report having used illicit drugs in the previous year – down from 30% in 1996;
- 19% reporting using cannabis in the last year;
- 7% reported using cocaine in the last year;
- 4% reported using amyl nitrate and ecstasy in the last year.

(Source: Davies et al., 2009; Hoare, 2009).

Translated into the Liverpool context, however, young people's drug-use is represented as being widespread, data suggesting that drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine and particularly cannabis remain popular (Liverpool City Council, 2008).

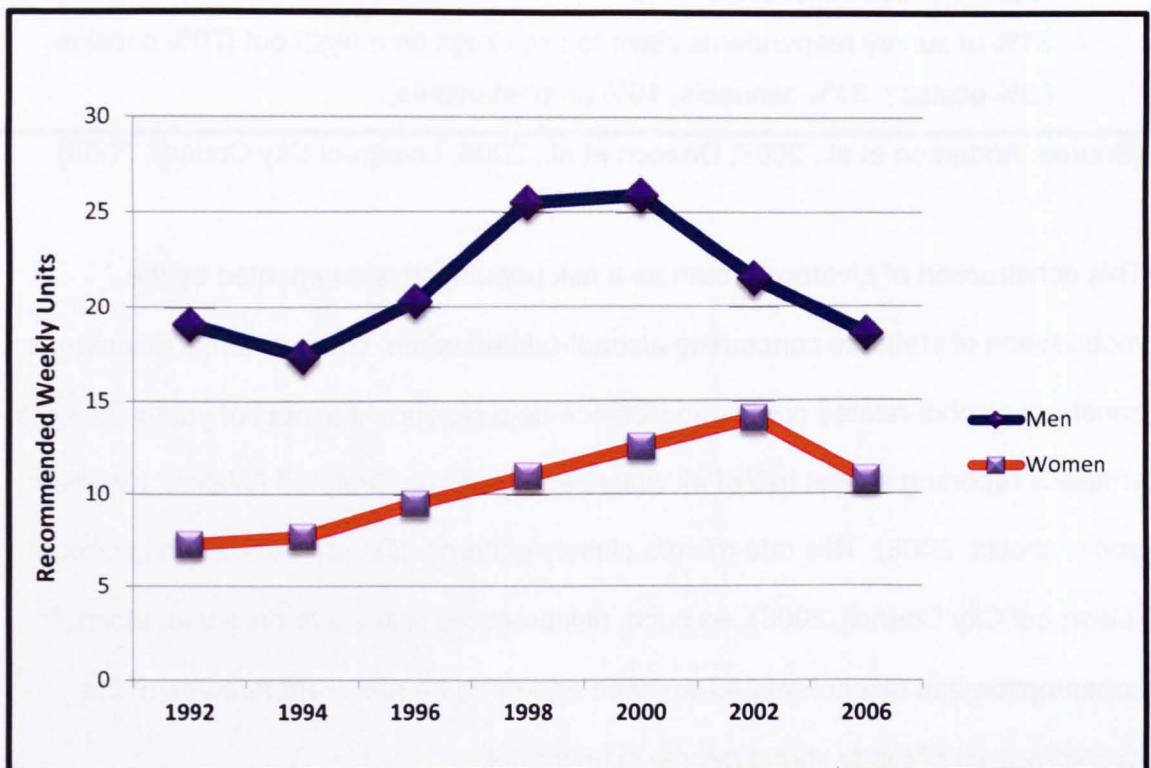
Further, regarding recorded crime, the year 2007/08 saw 7030 drug offences committed (13% of all crime), the majority of which were for possession of cannabis and cocaine (Liverpool City Council, 2008).

Reflecting the problematisation of youth more generally, the concern with drug-use has, to a large extent, been superseded by that of alcohol consumption. For many young people drinking is regarded as a positive experience (Blackman, 2009). Nonetheless, problem drinking is associated with a range of short and long term health problems as well as other risk behaviours such as violence, crime and unprotected sex (Engineer et al., 2003; British Medical Association, 2003; Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2003; Deacon et al., 2008). Indeed, as noted in the previous section, governmental risk discourses generally, and news media in particular, routinely construct contemporary youth as being synonymous with a binge drinking culture.

Yet, at a material level evidence for the extent of a drinking culture is unclear (France, 2007). Definitions of 'heavy', 'problem' or 'binge' drinking vary (Plant and Plant, 2006), while interpretations of trend data depend very much on what is taken to be the base year for comparison. Precise measurement is hence difficult. However, some general patterns amongst young people can be observed. For instance, fewer school children now consume alcohol, though those doing so consume greater volumes than previously; the mean units of weekly consumption having risen to 11.4 in 2006 (Fuller, 2009). Amongst 16-24 year-olds, evidence indicates that weekly consumption patterns for men is now at the same level as it was in 1992 (although this did peak in the late 1990s) and while men continue to drink more frequently and consume greater volumes

of alcohol than women, this gender gap has narrowed (although again consumption rates for 16-24 year-old women appear to be downwards: see Fig.16.).

Fig. 16: Mean alcohol consumption (units) in the last week in Great Britain: Men and Women aged 16-24



(Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009)

Regarding Liverpool, various data suggest that young people's drinking practices are especially problematic. Statistics on alcohol-related hospital admission rates for under-18 year olds, for example, locate Liverpool as significantly above the England average (Deacon et al., 2008). Further, research on patterns of alcohol consumption in Liverpool's city-centre also identifies a range of problems associated with young people (Fig.17.).

Fig. 17. Alcohol Consumption in Liverpool's Night-time Economy

- Liverpool in worse 10% of England's local authorities for binge drinking, alcohol-related and/or violent crime;
- Young people aged 18-35 consume an average of 18.3 units on a typical night out (20.5 units for men; 16 units for women) - five times above recommended daily levels
- 31% of survey respondents claim to use drugs on a night out (70% cocaine, 63% ecstasy, 34% cannabis, 10% amphetamines).

(Source: Anderson et al., 2007; Deacon et al., 2008; Liverpool City Council, 2008).

This construction of Liverpool youth as a risk population is augmented by the mobilisation of statistics concerning alcohol-related crime. Governmental discourses construct alcohol-related crime and violence as a significant aspect of youth lifestyles, statistics reporting almost half of all violence to be alcohol-related (Walker, Kershaw and Nicholas, 2006). This rate mirrors closely patterns of injury violence in Liverpool (Liverpool City Council, 2008). As such, risk practices relating to drug-use, alcohol consumption and alcohol-related violence appear to be prevalent features of the everyday lives of many young people in Liverpool.

Sexual Health and Teenage Pregnancy

Sexual behaviour is likewise a risk practice through which young people in general and young women in particular are problematised. As with many other aspects of youth lifestyles, patterns of sexual behaviour have undergone recent change. The average age of first sexual intercourse for both men and women currently stands at 16 and there has been an overall increase in the mean number of heterosexual

partners, same-sex experiences, and the number of people with concurrent sexual partners (Family Planning Association, 2003; Dawe and Rainford, 2004). Such changes are linked to relatively high rates of teenage pregnancy vis-à-vis other developed countries (British Medical Association, 2003) and increasing rates of STIs and HIV/AIDS which are especially prominent amongst women, under 25 year-olds, gay men, certain minority ethnic populations and those in the lower socio-economic positions (North West Public Health Observatory, 2005; British Medical Association, 2003).

Young women living in northern regions and/or in lower socio-economic groups are generally more likely to become teenage mothers than those occupying other social positions (British Medical Association, 2003). Indeed, data pertaining to Liverpool indicate that the annual rate of under-18 conception is 51.6 per 1000 15-17 year old females, significantly above the national average of 41.7 (Beavers, 2009). Likewise, infection rates are especially high across the North West in general and Liverpool in particular (North West Health Observatory, 2005). A report by Liverpool Primary Care Trust (2009) indicates that as many as one in ten 15-24 year-olds in the city have Chlamydia while other STIs are similarly above regional and national averages (Liverpool Primary Care Trust, 2009). Again, therefore, certain risky practices appear to be especially prevalent amongst Liverpool youth.

So far I have shown how governmental youth risk discourses, especially those that are manifest in news media, construct certain youth practices and populations as risk. I have also demonstrated how practices so defined are distributed materially, both nationally and, importantly, within the space of Liverpool. Of course, this does not

mean that *all* Liverpool youth are risky, nor that they all encounter such risk practices to the same degree. Rather, young people's experiences and understandings of risk are also influenced by the specific neighbourhood in which they live and their position in social space. In the following section I begin to explore these issues further, again focusing on both discursive and material aspects of youth risks.

Youth, Risk and Position in Social Space

At the material level many youth risk practices are distributed disproportionately according to age, class, gender and ethnicity (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). I illustrate this here with specific regard to the Liverpool context. In doing so, I consider further statistical data generated by a range of governmental institutions. This evidence is augmented with reference to data produced through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with professionals working with young people in a range of different capacities (Fig.18.).

Professionals interviewed referred to a range of risk practices including: road safety, internet usage, playing near railway lines, bullying and domestic abuse. However, it was found that the primary focus often lay with those very same practices constructed as risky through governmental youth risk discourses and media, namely: alcohol consumption, crime and anti-social behaviour, drug-use, racism and sexual health. How these practices were discussed, and the emphases given to each, varied according to their respective experiences of young people and the social positions occupied by the young people with whom they worked.

Those working with young people in an educational capacity shared a concern with alcohol consumption. Stephen, a Head Teacher whose school is located in one of the most deprived wards in England, noted that 'alcohol abuse is the biggest problem' in the area, 'serious binge drinking' being viewed as *the* main risk. Anne and Richard, who work in schools in different parts of Liverpool but which are nonetheless attended predominantly by young people from middle-class backgrounds, were more

Fig. 18. Professionals Working with Young People

Name⁴	Professional Role
Richard	Head Teacher at secondary school attended mainly by middle-class pupils (mixed)
Stephen	Head Teacher at secondary school attended mainly by working-class pupils (mixed)
Anne	Head of 6 th Form at secondary school attended mainly by middle-class pupils (female)
Keith	Police inspector with responsibility for policing of city centre
Kenny	Manager at city centre night club
Suzanne	Youth Worker in working-class area with high density white population
Kris	Youth worker in working-class area with high density BME population

circumspect, each stating that serious incidents involving alcohol consumption were relatively rare amongst their pupils.

Specific data on alcohol consumption by young people according to ward is unavailable, though the different accounts provided by Stephen, Richard and Anne

⁴ In order to protect the identities of all research participants names have been anonymised.

respectively are supported by other evidence suggesting a close correlation between deprivation and alcohol-related hospital admissions, school exclusions and teenage pregnancy (Deacon et al., 2008; Liverpool City Council, 2008). This suggests a close link between class, neighbourhood and alcohol consumption.

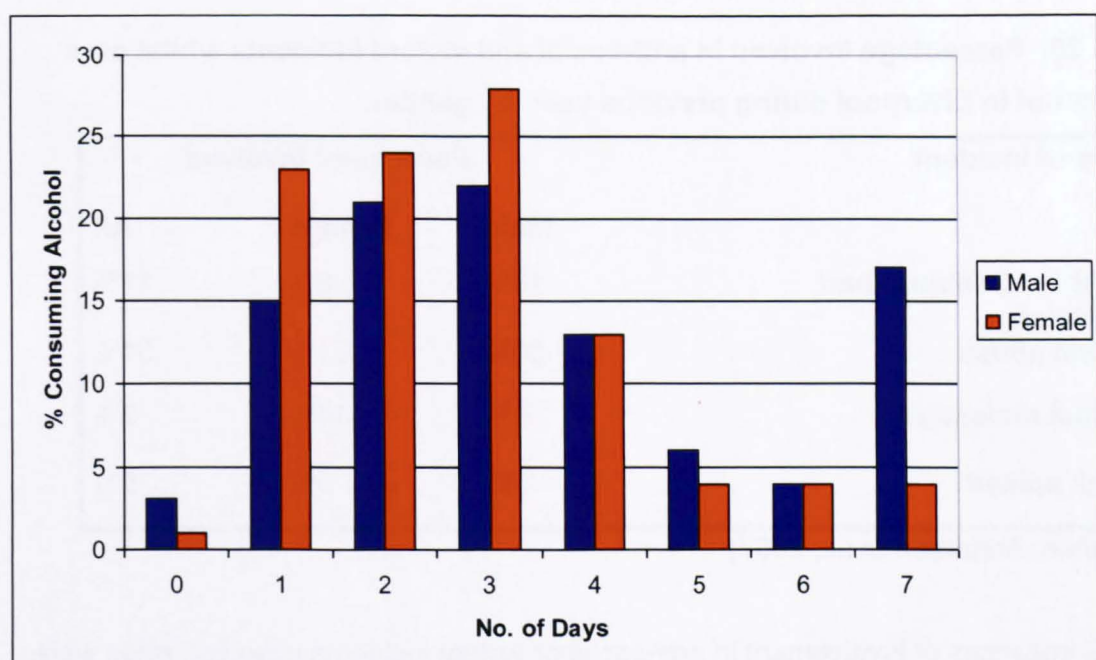
Reflecting broader governmental youth risk discourses and news media representations of youth risks and risky youth, accounts of alcohol consumption were likewise heavily gendered. Anne constructed young women at her school as relatively risk-averse in respect of alcohol consumption, here invoking traditional notions of middle-class respectable femininity (Skeggs, 1997). Richard, pointing to differences in how alcohol affects men and women, constructed young women as potentially at risk on account of being 'more vulnerable as a result of getting drunk.' This was echoed by Stephen who asserted a link between alcohol consumption and problematic sexual activity such as 'teenage pregnancies' or 'unwanted pregnancies', and 'girls having underage or even overage sex that they agree to that because of alcohol'.

According to recently published statistics, generally speaking, men drink more often and consume higher volumes of alcohol than women (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2009). However, in the context of Liverpool, research on patterns of alcohol consumption indicates that women are over-taking men (Fig.19). Further, Deacon et al., (2008) note that alcohol-attributable hospital admission rates for girls under 15 exceed that of boys, though the rate for older males is greater. Also, women are more vulnerable to alcohol-related sexual assault and while recorded crime figures for Liverpool suggest that such offences are relatively rare (Lightowlers et al., 2008), this

may have more to do with sexual assaults and rape often going unreported (Stern, 2010).

Professionals working with young people in the context of Liverpool's night time economy also focused on alcohol consumption. Both Keith (police inspector) and Kenny (night-club manager) problematised young people on account of the risks they expose themselves to when drinking excessively. This included references to the

Fig. 19. Number of days on which Young People in Liverpool Drank Alcohol in Past Week: Gender



(Source: Anderson et al., 2007)

increased potential for being victims of theft, involvement in violence and the greater likelihood of accidents (Keith), and for not knowing their limitations when drinking

(Kenny). Keith further noted that young women in particular often made 'themselves more vulnerable to be the victims of crime'.

A recent report suggests, however, a more complex picture in respect of the relation between gender and alcohol-related crime in Liverpool's nightlife (Fig.20.). Generally speaking, young men were found to be more likely to be involved in a fight whilst on a night out although interestingly, women were slightly more likely to report having been involved in a fight inside licensed premises. Young women were also much more likely to report being victims of sexual molestation.

Fig. 20. Percentage involved in anti-social and violent incidents whilst on a night out in Liverpool during previous year, by gender.

Type of Incident	Participant Involved		
	Male	Female	All
Fight in street/pub/bar/nightclub	13%	8%	11%
Verbal abuse	30%	31%	31%
Sexual molestation	4%	14%	9%
Drink spiked	5%	5%	5%

(Source: Anderson et al., 2007)

In all instances of involvement in anti-social or violent incidents however, rates were quite low. This was echoed by Keith and Kenny who both constructed Liverpool's night-life as relatively safe. Keith presented such incidences as rare while Kenny stressed that most clubbers were 'more interested in the dance culture than in drinking'. Further, both saw alcohol-related violence as having declined since the extension of licensing hours. Keith saw this as having resulted in 'less disorder and

violence' while Kenny suggested that people were consuming 'less alcohol over a longer period of time' with the consequence that they were 'less drunk'. This perception of Liverpool's nightlife as being relatively safe is further supported by Anderson et al., (2007) (Fig.21.).

**Fig. 21. Perceptions of Safety whilst on a night out in Liverpool:
by Gender and Age.**

	Male	Female	18-21	22-25
Very Safe	29%	15%	23%	21%
Fairly Safe	62%	68%	60%	69%
Fairly Unsafe	7%	15%	12%	9%
Very Unsafe	3%	2%	5%	1%
Don't Know	1%	0%	1%	0%

(Source: Anderson et al., 2007)

Hence, although alcohol-related violence does occur as part of Liverpool's city-centre nightlife, and while such incidences do have a gendered dimension, extant research data and the accounts of professionals working with young people in the city-centre do suggest that such risks are far less prevalent than is often assumed to be the case by governmental youth risk discourses.

Professionals working with young people in either an educational or a youth work capacity also referred to crime and anti-social behaviour, although again it was those working with young people living in more deprived areas who tended to emphasise these issues. Stephen saw crime and anti-social behaviour as especially significant, suggesting that young men were particularly at risk of becoming involved in a range

of criminal activities such as 'fencing stolen goods or stealing', 'car theft' or 'drugs', and of being attracted by the 'kudos' associated with such activities. Similarly, Kris and Suzanne, both youth workers based in deprived areas, pointed to the risks associated with crime. Suzanne problematised youth in terms of factors with the potential to inhibit youth-to-adult transitions, in particular, 'low family expectations' and a culture of poverty and welfare dependency, factors she regarded as increasing the possibility of involvement in crime. This was linked to young people 'having nowhere to go' which she felt led them to hang around on the streets. Similarly, Kris, who worked primarily with black or minority ethnic youth, saw extensive poverty as putting young people at risk of 'street robberies' and as being potentially exposed to 'drug taking, drug dealing' and 'gun crime'. Kris also suggested that many black or minority ethnic youth were at risk of racism and racially motivated violence.

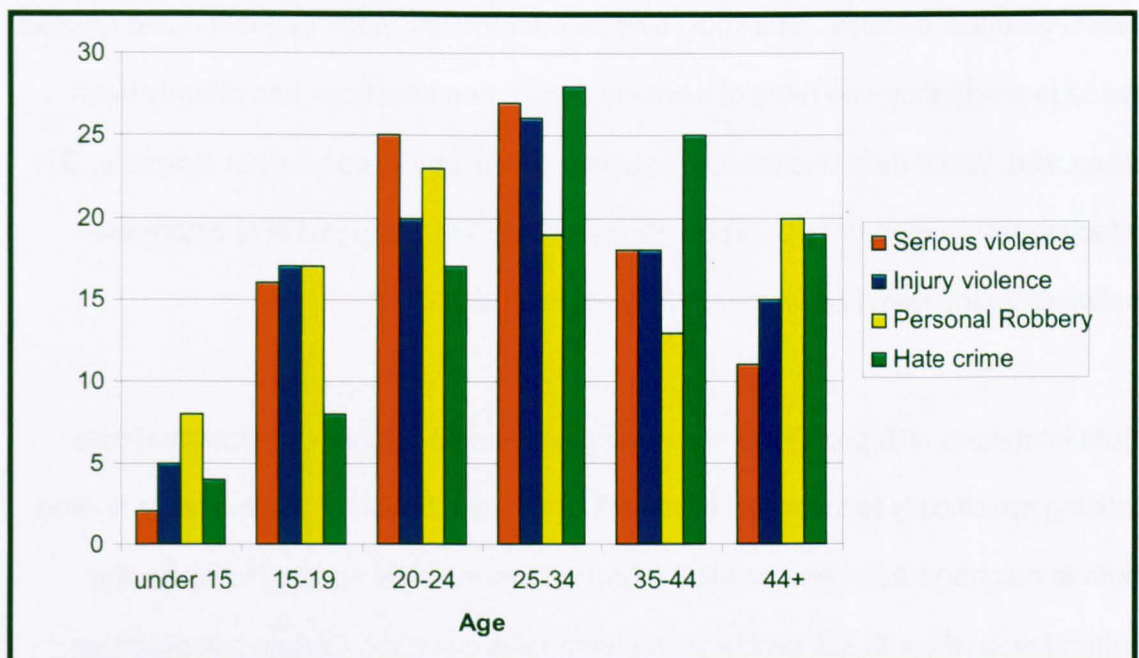
Again, such views are borne out by statistical evidence generated by local governmental agencies. Regarding drug-use, police statistics on individuals undergoing mandatory drug testing following arrest reported that white males aged under 25 were the more likely to produce positive tests than other groups, while the most common crime committed by young offenders was drug offences (Liverpool City Council, 2008).⁵ Similarly, while governmental discourses increasingly problematise young women through an emphasis on violent crime, materially it remains young, white, men living in deprived areas who are more likely to be recorded as either offender or victim (Liverpool City Council, 2008: Fig.22. and Fig.23.). Reported anti-

⁵ Police evidence for drug-use is problematic given that actual use often only comes to light where individuals are tested following arrest for a trigger offence. Given that it is men who are more likely to commit crime, and are therefore to be subjected to mandatory testing, such data may say very little about the relationship between drug-use and gender. In this respect, self report studies such as that undertaken by the British Crime Survey provides a more reliable indicator of drug-use by gender.

social behaviour likewise has a clear age, gender and ethnic dimension. The vast majority of incidents reported to Merseyside Police and the Liverpool Anti-social Behaviour Unit in 2007/08 involved young people aged 15 to 19, while of 94 Anti-social Behaviour Orders or Criminal Anti-social Behaviour Orders issued, 84% were to males and 95% to individuals of white British background (Liverpool City Council, 2008).

Finally, several professionals also problematised Liverpool youth via a focus on risks associated with sexual activity. Again, it was those working with young people in deprived parts of the city that raised this issue. As well as referring to the link between alcohol consumption and sex, Stephen also viewed young women as being at risk of

Fig.22. Crime in Liverpool 2007-08: % Victims by Age.



(Source: Liverpool City Council Citysafe, 2008)

Fig. 23. Crime in Liverpool 2007-08: Offenders by Age.

Offence Type	% Offenders by Age
Serious violence	31% committed by 20-23 year-olds
Injury violence	33% committed by 15-24 year-olds
Personal Robbery	47% committed by under 21 year-olds
Hate crime	47% committed by under 25 year-olds

(Source: Liverpool City Council Citysafe, 2008)

engaging in sexual intercourse, or of having children, as a means of gaining status amongst their peers. Suzanne likewise referred to sexual practices, particularly in respect of young women. However, although expressing concern that sex is 'just not perceived as a risk any more', she was critical of what she saw as the 'demonising of teenage pregnancy', condemning how some young mothers are 'treated within the health system' and suggesting that having a child as a teenager can be 'one of the most healthiest choices'. Statistical evidence for the link with deprivation and rates of teenage pregnancy and rates of sexually transmitted infections has already been discussed. While data illustrating these associations by ward was not available, STI infection rates collated by Liverpool Primary Care Trust suggest little difference between young men and women (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

Both interviews with professionals working with young people and statistical data relating specifically to Liverpool indicate that the distribution of youth risks is related both to neighbourhood and position of individuals in social space. However, the cultural map of youth risk practices in Liverpool is complex. Certain risk practices such as those relating to alcohol consumption, drug-use and sexual activity appear to be converging in terms of gender, though differences according to social class and

neighbourhood remain in evidence. Other practices relating to crime and anti-social behaviour are strongly linked to gender and social class, levels of deprivation associated with specific neighbourhoods being of particular significance in this respect. Living in neighbourhoods where particular risks are prevalent undoubtedly influences young people's experiences and understandings of them.

Conclusion

In mapping youth risks I have outlined how young people and their practices are routinely problematised via governmental youth risk discourses. A range of practices have been constructed as risky. In particular, traditional concerns with youth crime have been augmented by the construction of hitherto nuisance behaviours as anti-social (Scruton, 2004). This term, which barely registered in governmental discourses or media constructions in the 1990s, has emerged as the new shorthand for risky, 'deviant', youth. Likewise, concerns with alcohol consumption and a range of related practices have become pivotal to youth risk discourses: not only have these worked to further problematise youth, they have also given rise to a new order of regulatory techniques of surveillance. This is especially so with regards to young women, alcohol consumption supplementing traditional preoccupations with their sexual practices by way of chastising transgressions from respectable femininity. Such concerns have become the mainstay of contemporary news media: even where they speak with different voices and address different audiences, the cumulative effect has been to problematise young people to an unprecedented degree. Such constructions

of youth risks and risky youth are, not surprisingly, reproduced through local media also.

However, while young people may identify with dominant constructions of risk, this need not be necessarily so. Young people's experiences and understandings of risk are informed in large part by the material and cultural context of everyday life (France, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007). As I have noted, while Liverpool is, in many respects, a somewhat risky place in which to live, both discursively and materially, risks are associated with youth in different ways according to their neighbourhood and social position. This in and of itself opens up a conceptual space for exploring the complex relationship between youth, risk and identity. Yet, this is only part of the equation. Importantly, understandings and experiences of risk are also informed by young people's own historically shaped and culturally grounded meaning frames (Bunton, Green and Mitchell, 2004; Crawshaw, 2004). Groups and individuals occupying different social positions and neighbourhood spaces may also possess different understandings of risk. These, in turn, relate to particular culturally related understandings of social position. These constitute important aspects of the relationship between youth, risk and identity. In advancing my research I now show how understandings and experiences of risk were found to be patterned in various ways according to gender, ethnicity, class and neighbourhood and, in the following chapter, age.

Introduction: Risk and Age

As I discussed in Chapter One, young people have been closely associated with risk for many centuries. Nonetheless, in much of this research 'youth' has largely been conceptualised as an undifferentiated age category (Miles, 2000), little thought being given as to how young people of differing ages experienced or understood risk. In recent years, however, greater consideration has been given to how young people negotiate a range of risks as they make their transitions into adulthood. In this chapter I contribute to these more contemporary discussions by outlining how focus group data in my research showed how understandings of risk differed in important ways according to the age of the person. I also illustrate how these understandings of risk were used in ways that operated to produce and maintain age based distinctions, contributing to the discursive and material aspects of youth-to-adult transition.

While differing in important respects, accounts of the relationship between young people, crime and deviancy, and more recently, risk, offer important points of similarity. Firstly, youth is typically regarded as an ambiguous transitional phase between childhood and adulthood (Kelly, 2001; Henderson et al., 2007; Rixon and Turney, 2007). Youth is, in this sense, a process: a period of: 'becoming an adult, becoming a citizen, becoming independent, becoming autonomous, becoming mature, becoming responsible' (Kelly, 2001:30). Secondly, through the course of this

process young people's association with risk practices are seen to diminish as they move towards adulthood.

Recent decades have witnessed several major developments which have, in turn, had important implications for this process of becoming adult. In particular, structural changes in the economy have led to youth becoming an inherently risky, more uncertain and prolonged transitional period. Young people are forced to make an array of decisions regarding educational and occupational trajectories, with no guarantee that the choices made will necessarily be the right ones, while independent adulthood is deferred with more time spent living with parents in a state of semi-dependency. As a result, growing-up has in and of itself become an increasingly risky endeavour for many (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; Wyn and White, 1997; Miles, 2000; Catan, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Heinz, 2009).

Further, an expansion in the leisure economy, increased participation in consumption practices and the collapse of any clear divide between the tastes and practices of youth subcultures and mainstream youth have all resulted in many risk-taking practices becoming normal aspects of youth culture generally (Thornton, 1995; Miles, 2001; France, 2007). Combined, such factors have contributed to more young people engaging in greater levels of risk-taking than hitherto, especially in respect of drug-use and alcohol consumption (Plant and Plant, 1992; Miles, 2000; Le Breton, 2004).

It is in this context of broader social and cultural change associated with late modernity that concerns and anxieties about young people have proliferated and intensified, moral panics about youth risks and risky youth now being commonplace

(Armstrong, 2006; Case, 2006; Henderson et al., 2007; France, 2008; Garside, 2009; Thomson, 2011). These concerns reflect broader ambiguities over what it means to be grown up. Governmental discourses typically frame risks such as young parenthood and involvement in crime as manifestations of growing up too quickly, while cultural expressions of extended youth, such as the drinking culture, are also problematised (Thomson, 2011).

However, while, as I discuss in later chapters, gender, ethnicity, and class and local neighbourhood inform young people's experiences and understandings of risk, less is known of how these relate to age itself. Materially, many youth risks are unevenly distributed according to age (Jotangia, 2009; NHS, 2008; Hoare, 2009; Walker et al., 2009). But how do young people's understandings of youth risks vary by age? And how are such risks implicated as young people negotiate youth-to-adult transitions? Some studies have alluded to such questions. For example, Jack (1989 in Plant and Plant, 1992) observes that risk-taking and experimentation relating to alcohol, drug-use and sex are normal aspects of growing up which facilitate the development of maturity and independence from parents. Research relating more specifically to youth subcultures echoes this claim. Night-clubs for instance, are seen to provide a space where young people can engage in adult practices around drink, drugs and sex away from the prying gaze of parents or other adults. As such, night-clubbing is viewed as a social practice which constitutes a rite of passage, facilitating transitions from youth to an independent adulthood (Thornton, 1995; Northcote, 2006). Such youth cultural practices are also seen as having a symbolic status used to express and reproduce age-based distinctions. This is most explicit in Sarah Thornton's (1995) account of rave and club culture. Thornton illustrates how tastes and competencies in music,

fashion, alcohol and drug-use operate as forms of subcultural capital. This is held by subcultural trendsetters, those 'in-the-know', and is used, not only to produce and maintain hierarchical distinctions *within* a subculture (in Thornton's account, Rave), but also to mark distinctions from outsiders, especially adults. Accounts such as these are informative in that they suggest that particular risk practices have symbolic meanings which are implicated in various ways as young people make their transitions into adulthood. Nonetheless, these suggestions remain largely underdeveloped. Consequently, important questions as to how young people understand and experience risk in the context of their everyday lives: what meanings they attribute to less 'melodramatic' forms of risk practice, and what are the implications of such experiences and understandings for conceptualising youth-to-adult transitions are left unanswered.

In the past decade, however, youth studies research has begun to address such questions more extensively. Research into Danish teenagers' practices around drinking, partying and clubbing, for instance, shows how these acquire a symbolically significant status (Jarvinen and Gundlach, 2007). For these researchers, alcohol-consumption in particular operates as a form of symbolic capital which is used to mark and maintain distinctions between different youth lifestyles and, importantly, to denote an emergent adulthood. Other research has shifted the focus onto questions of how and why young people move between identities over time. Researchers working collectively as part of the *Inventing Adulthoods* project examine how risks with the potential to encumber transitions into adulthood are encountered and negotiated (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007;

Thomson, 2011). Examining the individual biographies of around 100 young people, questions are asked of the role that understandings and experiences of risk play in the process of becoming adult. This includes a focus on the most typically problematised risk practices, such as violent crime, alcohol and drug-use; but it also incorporates other risks such as those associated with educational choice, employment and training, relationships and health and wellbeing. These discussions provide valuable insights into the relationship between youth, risk and age. In particular, through exploring young people's unique, individualised biographies over a ten-year period, light is shed on how experiences and responses to risks are patterned in various ways and how the meanings of these shift over time. Understandings and experiences of risk, as well as responses to these, are demonstrated as not being universally shared; nor are they seen as according simplistically with dominant understandings of risk produced through governmental risk discourses. Rather the ways in which risks are encountered and negotiated by young people are seen to reflect the different material, social, cultural and symbolic resources available according to each individual's neighbourhood and social position (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). These, in turn, are shown to have important implications for young people as they make their transitions into adulthood.

In this chapter I contribute to this body of research, showing how my focus group data is illustrative of the material and discursive aspects of risk and youth which inform youth-to-adult transitions. By examining risk narratives co-produced by groups comprising young people of differing ages I show that risks were typically understood and experienced in varying ways. Groups were organised primarily according to whether they were recruited from schools (14-15 year-olds), sixth-form colleges or

youth-clubs (16-18), or university (19-24). Of course, these age categorisations are socially constructed and I do not propose that they represent a clear and unambiguous distinction between youth and adulthood. Indeed, reflecting differential experiences of socialisation (Lahire, 2001, 2003), young people of different ages sometimes spoke of risk in similar ways, while others narrated risk in a manner discordant with their age-group as a whole. Further, risk narratives were clearly informed by broader governmental youth risk discourses, the socio-economic context where participants lived and their position in social space as I discuss in subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, it was found that young people discussed issues such as news media representations of youth, their views of other youth, and their own engagement with, or avoidance of, various risk practices in ways which were clearly patterned by the age of different groups.

In using focus groups, participants were able to draw upon *shared* experiences and understandings of risk by making connections to actual events in their everyday lives. This allowed them to develop detailed risk narratives through exchanging anecdotes, recalling shared or similar experiences, and expressing their feelings towards certain risk practices with their peers. Not only did this facilitate access to their respective relations to their social location, it also elucidated how risk practices were experienced and understood in different ways according to age group. This, in turn, revealed how risks were mobilised in the situated accomplishment of aged identities and in the negotiation of youth-to-adult transitions. It is to these matters which I now turn.

'The media is always scapegoating people': Contesting or Accepting Governmental Youth Risk Discourses

Risk narratives were patterned inasmuch as participants of different ages discussed both media representations of youth and their experiences of encounters with other young people in quite similar ways. As outlined in the previous chapter, news media routinely construct youth as a risk population in need of greater supervision, regulation and even punishment. Such representations were, however, frequently criticised as being both unrealistic and overly negative, the young people in my study using a range of linguistic repertoires (Wooffitt, 1993) by which to contest the problematisation of youth implicit in governmental youth risk discourses.

For those aged 19-24, the view that news media exaggerate and distort the extent of the youth problem was commonplace. Robbie (Focus Group 2) asserted that 'the media blows things out of proportion' and Carl that the 'media is always scapegoating people.' Sarah (Focus Group 3) likewise spoke of having recently watched a television documentary which she felt had portrayed young people's alcohol consumption in terms quite at odds with her own experiences. Similarly, Karen (Focus Group 3) criticised the media's tendency to suggest that 'everyone is out of control with drinking'. Most assertive in this respect was Paula (Focus Group 1) who claimed that the view that young people are irresponsible and do not care about society is 'just a lie'.

Comparable sentiments were evident in boys' and girls' risk narratives. David (Focus Group 8) expressed resentment at how the terms 'yob' and 'youth' were used disparagingly and suggested that such terms failed to grasp the heterogeneity of

young people: as he put it: 'there's so many different categories of young kids and that [...] you can't stereotype them either cos there's so many different [types]'. Girls from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 14) were likewise highly critical. Ruby protested that media 'just like pointing all the bad things', a view augmented in the next turn by Marwa who asserted that: 'not all young people are a problem'. Across these risk narratives, young people resisted the problematisation of youth implicit in governmental risk discourses, by asserting a tendency in media to overstate the 'problem' and to perpetuate an unrealistic view of contemporary youth.

Narratives were further patterned in that, at least in the early part of their discussions, participants tended to speak of other young people and their risk practices in somewhat positive and sympathetic terms. This typically took the form of playing down the extent of certain risks or of seeking to justify young people's risk practices. Referring to the media's association of gun and knife crime with young people living in Princes Park (Toxteth), Amaani and Ruby (Focus Group 14) asserted that they had never actually witnessed such activities. Drug-use was recognised as being prevalent, but again its extent as an everyday risk was played down. As Ruby put it: 'they sell drugs, weed an' that, but that's all they're doing'. Here, the utterance 'that's all they're doing' operated to minimise the significance of cannabis use, Ruby effectively constructing this as an inconsequential risk practice and simultaneously positioning those who do engage with such practices as relatively non-risky.

White, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) also claimed that young people generally were not as bad as news media suggest. John asserted that young people were misrepresented and that he treated everyone as he found them. As he put it: 'As far

as I'm concerned everyone's sound as me as long as they haven't done anything against me'. In this utterance John not only contested dominant governmental discourses, but also positioned himself as a person able to make rational calculations as to the riskiness of other youths rather than somebody who uncritically accepted the view of troublesome youth perpetuated by media.

The older men and women expressed similar views, again frequently downgrading or exonerating the risk practices of other young people. For instance, echoing claims made by Suzanne, the Youth Worker, Hannah (Focus Group 3) claimed that one of the main difficulties facing young people was the fact that they 'have got absolutely nothing to do'. This was echoed by Karen in the next turn who stated that: 'kids don't mean to cause trouble, they're just bored!' Anne (Focus Group 1) also contended that young people's problem behaviours were due to their having nothing to do and - expressing her views very much in terms of social class - with council estates being allowed to become 'run down' by government and local authorities. This was supported by Karen who said: 'it's like cabin fever, they feel trapped. People get frustrated and take it out on their neighbourhood.' In these utterances the women positioned themselves as rational individuals capable of making informed assessments of which youths comprise a risk population and *why* these are prone to engage in problematised practices. At the same time, they contested dominant governmental youth risk discourses, drawing on an interpretative repertoire which understands risky youth as victims of particular social and material circumstances.

The view that young people constitute a risk population to be regulated and managed was routinely challenged and there was a tendency to construct young people

generally, and by extension themselves, as relatively unproblematic. Yet, risk narratives were further patterned in that they tended to become more critical of other young people as they unfolded through processes of conversational interaction. Illustrating the benefits of the focus group method, participants drew on their own experiences of risk, exchanging anecdotes of various encounters with other youths in which they felt to be in some way threatened. Through these processes governmental risk discourses were often re-negotiated or even accepted, participants identifying more explicitly with constructions of risky youth. This had further implications for how they positioned themselves in the subject positions made available via dominant youth risk discourses.

For instance, despite their earlier assertions, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) went on to voice concern at the risk practices of other, especially *younger*, boys. As I discuss in Chapter Eight, much of their narrative was informed by class location, the boys focusing on threats of violence posed both by boys from a school in a working-class area and, working-class 'scallies' who they often encountered in a local park. This tendency to shift from a relatively sympathetic to a more overtly critical account was also evident in the narrative of white, working-class, women (Focus Group 12). Initial criticism of media representations of hoodies (the hooded top which has in recent years come to symbolise anti-social youth) subsequently gave way to an account of how they often felt intimidated when confronted by males wearing hoodies, especially when walking alone. Further, although initially positioning other youths in relatively sympathetic terms, the women's narrative turned to consideration of alcohol-related acts of vandalism and nuisance behaviour which they suggested were common features of everyday life in their neighbourhood. In this account the young

women went on to condemn those who 'just sit in the park and stuff or make loud noises and keep you awake all night' or who 'mainly hang about on the shops.' Indeed, the women discussed such acts in quite disparaging, even moralistic, tones:

Focus Group 12:

- Julie: Just think it's fun but it's not.
Clare: Yeah, just that they're big an' showin' off
Julie: Yeah
Dave: Yeah – and what do you think about that? [to Jackie]
Jackie: They should stop it.
Julie: They need to grow up, cos in reality everything's going to cost money. It's going start - when they get a job it's going to cost more tax and that to pay for all this what they've done or what their kids have done

In these conversational moments Julie, Jackie and Clare not only co-produced an account of risky youth, they also engaged in important identity work; their frequent use of 'they' reproducing a boundary between immature and irresponsible risky others and themselves as morally superior, mature, sensible and risk-averse young women.

Such patterning was further evident in the narratives of 19-24 year-olds. Illustrating how focus groups can engender a sense of safety in numbers, Robbie and Pete (Focus Group 2) felt sufficiently at ease so as to express shared concerns of feeling vulnerable in certain contexts; both acknowledged having felt intimidated when walking past 'gangs of young lads' and as subsequently putting their heads down and crossing over the road so as to avoid the possibility of confrontation. Further, also drawing upon media representations of anti-social youth, John constructed a boundary between himself and risky youth by criticising the tendency of many

younger men to wear similar looking black tracksuits and hooded tops. As he put it: 'kids don't help themselves with the way they dress' and adding that, 'they're asking for trouble' by dressing to 'fit-in with their mates' and 'to look hard'.

The older, middle-class women were also critical of younger people. Drawing on dominant gender and governmental youth risk discourses, Jo (Focus Group 1) expressed concern at what she perceived to be the excessively risky practices of *younger* women. Stating that 'ladette culture' had 'spiralled out of control', Jo was particularly scathing of risk practices that she regarded as having become normal aspects of younger women's lifestyles; as she put it: 'doing drugs is normal, drinking alcohol is normal, trying to be a nice person is *not* normal'. The phrase 'normal, here repeated several times with respect to problematised risk practices, worked as an extreme case formulation, constructing young women more broadly as a particularly risky population. This condemnation of younger people resounded throughout this narrative. Expressing her views in terms of class as well as age (see Chapter Eight), Maureen criticised what she defined as a 'scallie culture' comprised of younger people who 'sit around and get drunk', while Paula suggested that 'kids who do cause trouble are generally from council estates'.

Other women similarly associated risk with younger people. Rebecca (Focus Group 3) claimed: 'I do think that younger children aren't as disciplined as they used to be', attributing this 'trend' to increased family dysfunction and women going out to work. These comments were a prelude to an extended co-produced narrative in which Rebecca, Karen and Sarah discussed several issues felt to be wrong with contemporary youth. These included: parents being younger than in previous

generations, there being too many single parents, young parents failing to transmit moral values and respect to their children, parents failing to spend quality time interacting with their children and not teaching children important social skills, and young people taking for granted treats such as going to fast-food restaurants or being taken to the park. Clearly, for these women, younger, working-class youths were regarded as a risk population.

In these narratives young women drew on a broader governmental youth risk discourse that constructs youth risks and risky youth in specific ways. In particular, there was a strong emphasis throughout on risk practices being associated with some form of social and moral decline: other young women were positioned as lacking in respect, having no parental discipline, possessing poor social skills and so forth. In this way many of the young women ultimately positioned themselves in quite morally conservative terms, their initial condemnation of media constructions of risky youth ultimately giving way to a positioning which aligned them far more closely with dominant youth risk discourses.

Young people's risk narratives were clearly patterned. Most started their narratives by criticising media representations and attempting to portray young people in quite positive ways. However, in many cases, the unfolding of risk narratives through conversational interactions saw young people becoming more critical of youth, citing and reproducing dominant governmental youth risk discourses. Importantly, at the same time as they reproduced these discourses they were also at pains to distance themselves from problematised youth: engaging in boundary work, risky youth were routinely cast as *other* young people. This was evident across the age range, but

especially in the risk narratives of the older young people. As I examine in subsequent chapters, this construction of other young people as risky was informed in no small measure by gender, ethnicity and class. Importantly, however, as I discuss next, the age of participants was also found to play a significant role in informing accounts of youth risks and risky youth.

'But we don't do nothin' risky': 14-15 Year-olds

Risk narratives generated by 14-15 year-olds were quite limited in scope. Only four groups were conducted: one with girls and three with boys (Appendix 1). Two of the groups (13 and 14), which comprised boys and girls from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, were relatively short in duration and while they did discuss everyday risk practices, this was only ever in a somewhat stilted manner. This was due primarily to the manner in which they were 'recruited', a seemingly willing Headmaster eventually 'giving' me two groups of young people for little more than 30 minutes each. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these participants seemed unwilling to engage while the limited duration of the focus group denied me the opportunity to develop any kind of rapport. Further, and related, many of these participants appeared to lack either the competency or confidence required for talking in a group setting, echoing Silva and Wright's (2005) observations regarding the importance of instrumental knowledge required for engaging in focused discussions. Doubtlessly, the group dynamic was also affected by my positionality as an older, white, male; my position not being helped by the manner in which groups were formulated. The other groups (8 and 11) comprised white middle- and working-class boys respectively. These were far more

talkative and, as such, generated quite detailed narratives indicative of how they experienced and understood risk.

Common to all of these groups was a general *absence* of references to engaging with problematised youth risk practices. None spoke of alcohol consumption, drug-use or of involvement in anti-social behaviour; rather attention focused on other practices such as hanging around with friends or, amongst the boys, various acts of daring do which, as I discuss in Chapter Six, are conventionally associated with performances of masculinity.

White, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) discussed a range of practices which they understood to be risky: this included; riding bikes in an area of a local park known locally as 'the jumps' (a makeshift dirt-track on which young people ride BMX bikes), the presence of other gangs in their local neighbourhood, being in unfamiliar areas of an evening, and messing around in the city centre. In particular, discussion focused on the potential for skirmishes with boys from other schools. Alex spoke at length about a forthcoming fight with boys from a neighbouring school and numerous other references were made to confrontations with boys from a predominantly working-class area whom they routinely encountered when travelling to and from school. Working-class boys (Focus Group 11) said less of their own engagement in risky practices, again focusing on more benign practices such as messing around in friends' houses or youth clubs, or sport-related risks such as Stuart's claim to have almost been hit in the face with a golf club when playing with a friend. Other risks related largely to near misses with cars when crossing roads near to the school or local shops. Aside from these practices, they too discussed threats posed by groups

of boys, both inside school and across parts of their estate. Again, however, their primary focus was with the risk practices of *others* rather than with their own.

Boys from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 13) also focused less on their own risk practices and more on threats posed by other boys, both within their immediate neighbourhood and in the city-centre. However, as I discuss in Chapter Seven, such risks were discussed almost exclusively in racialised terms, the boys associating risk with threats of racial abuse or assault. Girls from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 14) also found it difficult to identify practices routinely engaged with which they regarded as risky and much of their narrative again concerned relatively benign practices such as shopping, helping the family with cooking and hanging around with friends at their houses. Indeed, for these girls risk was presented as simply not featuring in their everyday lives, Ruby forcibly asserting that 'we don't really do nothin' risky!'

Both boys and girls defined risk as threats posed by others, far less being said of their own risky practices. Where engagement in practices understood as risky was discussed then the emphasis lay with activities relating to home, school and their immediate neighbourhood. In this respect, understandings and experiences of risk were bounded by age. Taken together, the absence of references to problematised youth risks and the emphases on relatively benign practices associated with early youth-hood worked to reflexively position them in normative terms as young people who fall outside the category of risky youth.

This positioning was strengthened in their resistance to problematising youth risk discourses. Many were acutely aware that they were often assumed by adults to be a risk population. Such a positioning was contested. This was most evident in the risk narrative generated by middle-class boys who asserted with some disdain that they felt they were often treated as being immature or as potential trouble-makers:

Focus Group 8:

John: Yeah, that's what I don't like is like if you go to like youth clubs you get treated

David: like a baby

John: Yeah like! You get treated like you are there because you're going to be outside and you're going to be doing this big crime or whatever, that you're being antisocial or whatever when you're just walking around the streets

David: The problem with the youth groups is that you get dragged in and then you get treated like

John: you always get treated like you're doing something wrong

David: like you've got nothing better to do so

Drawing on shared experiences of youth-clubs, the boys disavowed attempts by adults to position them as problem youth, expressing clear resentment at their perceived treatment and claiming to feel 'patronised' and treated 'like infants' (John). Indeed, such attitudes were claimed to make them 'want to rebel' (Daniel). Youth-clubs were viewed as symbolising childhood and immaturity, a position from which they sought to distance themselves. The boys instead expressed a preference for hanging around on streets, playing in parks or messing around in shopping centres. However, in this respect, their very attempts to position themselves as mature and responsible served to position them as subjects of a problematising youth risk

discourse, as boys requiring surveillance and regulation on account of their potential for engaging in practices understood by many as anti-social.

Across all of these groups then, the emphasis was largely on *not* engaging in youth risk practices and as resenting their positioning by adults as risky youth. Of course, this is not to say that risk practices did not feature in their everyday lives. Absences may have had as much to do with my positionality, some participants evidently feeling uncomfortable discussing aspects of their everyday lives with an older researcher conducting research in a school setting (which itself may have accorded my research an authoritative status which inhibited discussion). This difficulty was potentially exacerbated in groups comprising girls and/or young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds where my position as an older, white, male may have functioned as a barrier to discussion. Nevertheless, the fact that the focus group method facilitates reference to participants' everyday events and practices (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004), and that the form and content of narratives remained consistently patterned across all groups, suggests that these boys and girls did indeed both experience and understand risk in these terms and that, as such, they did regard themselves as being non-risky.

'I don't drink on the streets cos I'm older': 16-18 Year-olds

A greater number of groups comprising 16-18 year-olds were undertaken and on the whole these produced much richer and more in-depth risk narratives. These young men and women were far more comfortable talking in a group setting, particularly

those from middle-class backgrounds, and, albeit with some exceptions, they appeared to be less inhibited by my presence. This had much to do with the fact that these groups comprised willing volunteers: that is to say, unlike some of the groups of younger people, these individuals were approached initially by me and asked if they wished to take part in the study. It was also clear from the outset that these groups were based largely around pre-existing peer relations which enhanced a sense of collective bonding and provided a greater confidence to talk about everyday risks.

These narratives generally focused upon a broader array of risk practices, with alcohol consumption, clubbing and, in the case of the women, sexual harassment, featuring prominently. There were nevertheless, important variations. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, for example, those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds discussed risk in very different terms to their white counterparts. Also, reflecting specific interactions of class and gender, several young middle-class men (Focus Group 5) and women (Focus Group 10) spoke less of risk-taking and more of being *at* risk, again albeit in different ways. For those who did discuss engagement in risk-taking practices, however, of particular interest was the way in which many such practices were mobilised as a form of symbolic capital through which they distinguished themselves, not only from people younger than themselves, but also their previously *younger* selves.

Young working-class women (Focus Groups 6 and 12) and several of those from middle-class backgrounds (Focus Group 4) spoke of excessive drinking. This was constructed as a risk practice engaged in either in clubs or bars, friends' houses or private parties. Many were aged 16-17 and as such were below the age whereby they

could legally enter clubs or be served alcohol. Yet, in contrast to problematising youth risk discourses, such underage drinking was not regarded as especially problematic. Rather, of greater significance was that, while claiming to have regularly drunk alcohol on the streets or in parks when younger, this was a practice no longer engaged in on account of their age. For example:

Focus Group 6:

Jade: [...] cos if you are out and people are drinking on the street it looks a bit crap really doesn't it! if everyone is drinking.

Emma: we don't, we don't do that, we don't drink on the streets anymore – just in people's houses

Jackie (Focus Group 12), aged 16, likewise noted that 'when I was a bit younger I was on the streets like every weekend having a drink, but now cos I have got a bit older I don't drink as much anymore'. In these narratives Jackie, Jade and Emma took up a moral position in respect of street-based alcohol consumption. In particular, the utterance that such a practice is 'a bit crap' worked to construct this as a devalued form of symbolic capital, one mobilised in marking a point of distinction between themselves and *younger* people. At the same time, street-based drinking was constructed as a practice that they themselves had grown out of. In this respect, the women's discussion of alcohol consumption worked to contest dominant governmental risk discourses which problematise young women's drinking. Drawing instead on their own cultural risk discourses and meaning frames, drinking was constructed, not only as a normal aspect of their everyday lives, but also as a symbolic practice used to mark a distinction between themselves as young women and their younger, less mature and less responsible, selves.

This reflexive positioning was augmented by claims to ensure personal safety when drinking in clubs or parties. Julie (Focus Group 12) spoke of purposively avoiding the city centre on account of having heard stories of women having drinks spiked or being sexually assaulted. Others discussed how their own experiences and anecdotal accounts of the dangers posed to young women when drunk had led them to adopt a series of risk-avoidance strategies. These ranged from the sharing of taxis, the use of mobile phones to ensure everyone arrived home safely, the monitoring of each other's welfare by members of the group staying relatively sober and, in one case (Focus Group 6), the use of their 'rules of the night', a series of guidelines used to remind one another of the need to stay safe. As I explore in Chapter Five, such understandings of risk were informed by gender: but they were also strongly influenced by age in that the strategies discussed were indicative of how they sought to position themselves as more mature, responsible and risk aware, young women. Yet, attempts to position themselves as mature and responsible were frequently undermined by ambiguities and contradictions in their narratives. Hence, despite her earlier assertion that she no longer drank alcohol in public places, Julie (Focus Group 12) went on to note that she still did so on occasion. Similarly, while claiming to use various risk avoiding strategies, other young women (Focus Groups 4 and 6) went on to discuss how excessive drinking, together with all the risks this entailed, remained a regular feature of their weekend socialising.

Such ambivalences were most clearly evident in Sophie, Gemma, Katrina and Ashlea's (Focus Group 6) co-produced narrative of alcohol-related sexual intercourse. Reflecting different socialisation processes and different material experiences of risk, these women discussed alcohol and sexual intercourse in very different terms.

Sophie claimed that she only very rarely drank alcohol and that she had never engaged in sexual intercourse. Noting that she had friends who had had pregnancy scares, terminations or children of their own, Sophie went on to assert that these experiences had resulted in her wishing to defer sexual intercourse until she was older. Sophie's narrative was clearly bound up with gender discourses as I discuss in Chapter Five: yet, it was also informed by cultural understandings of maturity and responsibility associated with *becoming* adult. This reflexive positioning as a responsible and mature young woman was augmented in her next utterance whereby she claimed that: 'if I did [have sex] I'd use something cos it's not worth ruining your life'. However, while asserting their use of the 'rules of the night' as a means of avoiding risks (see Chapter Five), Gemma, Katrina and Ashlea went on to claim that sexual intercourse was a risk practice they sometimes engaged with when they had been drinking. As Gemma put it, unprotected sex was a 'heat of the moment kind of thing', adding that she rarely took precautions as 'you never think it will happen to you, ever!' In this sense, these women expressed considerable awareness of the risks of alcohol-related unprotected sex; yet, in acknowledging that this was nevertheless a risk practice engaged with when they had been drinking, they effectively positioned themselves ambivalently as both responsible *and* irresponsible young women.

Many young women also suggested that peer pressure and the expectation that people of their age take certain risks continued to inform their own attitudes towards certain risk practices. In doing so, reflexive positioning as mature and responsible young women was again often undermined. Jackie and Julie (Focus Group 12) noted how friends often pressurised them into smoking by calling them 'chicken and crap

like that'. Similarly, Jackie and Clare, who both claimed to regularly use cannabis, asserted that this was a normal, almost inevitable, aspect of young people's lifestyles:

Focus Group 12:

Jackie: cos every young person is gonna go through taking drugs just to see what they're like and whether it has like a good side effect or a bad side effect on them. But, and then they're gonna go – everyone will most probably gone through the stage of taking drugs [...] Everyone's going to try it once in their life.

In this extract, Jackie's assertions that 'every young person is gonna go through taking drugs' and 'everyone's going to try it once in their life' again operated as extreme case formulations: youth was presented as a phase in which forms of experimentation were to be expected while drug-use was constructed as a normal aspect of youth lifestyle. Through constructing drug-use in such terms, this utterance simultaneously worked to justify Jackie's own cannabis use.

For those aged 16-18 there was a tendency in their risk narratives to position themselves somewhat precariously between youth and adulthood. Throughout their risk narratives claims were made as to being responsible, mature, risk aware young men and women. Yet, in many cases, such reflexive positioning was undermined. In particular, narratives were indicative of how attempts at negotiating youth-to-adult transitions were often mitigated by the continued influence of broader cultural and social factors, including peer pressure and the expectations of engagement in forms of risk practice associated with contemporary youth culture.

'As you get older your attitude changes': 19-24 Year-olds

The three groups of older youths comprised young men and women drawn from a local university. Again these were evidently comfortable talking in a group setting and co-produced detailed risk narratives characterised by good levels of conversational interaction. These too discussed practices relating to alcohol consumption, drug-use, clubbing and associated risks such as threats of violence or sexual harassment and assault. However, these risk practices were typically discussed in very different ways than their younger counterparts.

Generally speaking, these young men and women spoke of risk practices relating to drug-use and alcohol consumption in ways which operated to reflexively position them as mature and responsible. Regarding drug-use, for example, John, Robbie, Mike and Peter (Focus Group 2) identified with governmental youth risk discourses by stating emphatically that they were against drugs. Similarly, Gill (Focus Group 1) asserted that she had 'never used drugs' while Sarah and Rebecca (Focus Group 3) stressed that they could not understand why people would want to do so. In expressing such judgements they simultaneously positioned themselves as responsible adults and distinguished themselves morally from irresponsible drug-users.

For others, discussion of drug-use was indicative of their transition towards a more responsible adulthood. Karen and Jo (Focus Group 1) and Hannah and Karen (Focus Group 3) referred to having experimented with drugs when in their mid-teens. Jo said of her drug-use that she had needed to 'get it out of my system', while Karen claimed

that this had been consequent upon peer pressure when she was younger. This emphasis on having *become* more mature and responsible was evident throughout their narratives as illustrated by the following:

Focus Group 3:

- Karen: as you get older your attitude changes, it's who you hang around with - it's a lot to do with independence and that, like how naïve you are with your friends and that [...] you've got respect for yourself as you mature, like I've got more respect for myself now, getting myself an education and that, like I'm still mates with them people but I don't go out with them and they're still going around taking drugs and that
- Hannah: Doesn't it feel odd though like if you went out with them again now, like years on?
- Karen: I wouldn't take them
- Hannah: but wouldn't it be odd seeing them taking them because you've gone through this little transition
- Karen: o.k. if I see people now even, I'm like I've been in that situation myself and you're thinking, you know when you are outside and you're looking in and you're thinking 'did I actually look like that' and you just think back

Here, in discussing shared experiences of using drugs when younger, the women constructed this risk practice as downgraded forms of symbolic capital. This was mobilised by way of marking the women's earlier lack of independence, self-respect and their naivety. Discussing drug-use in these terms the women reflexively positioned themselves as mature, responsible adults who had *grown out* of a less mature, less responsible risk practice on account of having gone through, in Hannah's words, 'this little transition'. At the same time they distinguished themselves from

other, same-aged, people who use drugs, again illustrating how understandings of risk practices inform identity work.

Alcohol consumption was also often discussed in ways productive of a more responsible adult subject position. Speaking of having regularly consumed alcohol when younger, the men all claimed that this was now something they had grown out of. Mike asserted he now only drank 'one or two pints a couple of nights a week' in a local pub and Robbie commented that his preference was for 'hanging-out at friends' houses where we just drink and watch films'. Again, mobilising alcohol as a risk practice associated with becoming adult, John spoke of having grown out of drinking altogether. Illustrating the influence of his unique pattern of socialisation consequent, in part at least, on having grown up in a particularly deprived area of Liverpool, John discussed his drinking habits when a young teenager. John, a very big, physically-imposing man who, according to his own description, had a 'face that attracts trouble', claimed that he had regularly drunk excessively and that this had often led him to getting involved in fights, a practice that he claimed to have become 'fed-up with' leading him to give up drinking. Hannah, Sarah, Rebecca and Karen (Focus Group 3) also positioned themselves as more responsible drinkers, expressing a preference for drinking either in local bars in the company of boyfriends, or with friends at home.

Related, several expressed antipathy towards drinking in Liverpool's city-centre. John, who works as a doorman at a city centre club, claimed that 'I love Liverpool but I hate the night-life', while all of the men asserted that they now avoided areas such as Concert Square (one of Liverpool's main locations for bars and clubs) due to the risk of fights with other males. Karen, Hannah and Sarah (Focus Group 3), who all

claimed to have started clubbing when aged 15, indicated that they now tended to avoid night-clubs on account of there being 'too many 15 year-olds': as Karen put it: 'the people you used to go to school with, well it's their little brothers and kids and they're in the clubs now – I just feel too old to go to town.' Nightclubs were also associated with drug-use, Hannah noting that this 'ruins your night', while, as I discuss in the next chapter, threats of sexual harassment were claimed to further deter many of these women from clubbing.

While most of these young people tended to stress having *grown out* of certain risk practices, there was nonetheless some dissonance, particularly in respect of drug-use. Carl (Focus Group 2) claimed to have used 'pills, cocaine, mushrooms, Ecstasy, acid, like everything apart from crack and heroin', while Paula (Focus Group 1) stated that she was a frequent Ecstasy user. Of interest here was the degree to which both sought to justify their drug-use through claims to be both rational and responsible. Carl, for instance, rationalised his drug-use on account of this being 'no more risky than alcohol', while Paula asserted that 'I am always informed about the drugs I take. Drugs are a personal risk'. Indeed, for both, their drug-use had nothing to do with peer pressure, but was simply a matter of personal choice. As such, both Paula and Carl sought to position themselves as mature and responsible adults, not through the condemnation of drug-use, but via an assertion of their ability to make sensible, rational, choices.

Claims to being more mature and responsible were evident elsewhere in these narratives. Of particular interest was the degree to which other practices were constructed as tending to take precedence over clubbing and excessive drinking.

Indicative of a transition towards a more responsible adulthood, several commented on how their income was often used for purposes other than going on nights out.

Karen, Jo and Kath (Focus Group 1) spoke extensively of difficulties in managing personal finances as they worked towards independent adulthood while, for many, the cost of clubbing was viewed as being of increasing concern:

Focus Group 3:

Hannah: [...] I know people who like erm, they went to all clubs and everything when they were like 15 and they want to go the new ones which are opening now which absolutely cost a bomb to get into like everything else, they'll go into places like that. But I don't want to like pay loads of money, don't want to waste my money on it so

Karen: Its fifty pounds for a decent night out and then for fifty pound what could you get with that? That's like

Sarah: [to Karen] you know, what's the first thing I thought of when you said 'fifty pounds' – what paint I could get with that! Or a new light or something (laughs)

In this conversational moment Hannah, Karen and Sarah constructed clubbing as a risk practice which was increasingly financially unsustainable, the money required for a night out being viewed, not only as wasteful, but also as potentially better spent on more adult-oriented pursuits such as home decor.

Narratives also focused on risk practices relating to the work-place. John, spoke of the risks of violent confrontation associated with his work as a night-club doorman, referring to an occasion when he had been hit on the head with a bottle. Similarly, Pete spoke of his employment in an off-licence where he had recently been held-up

at gun-point while Mike, who worked in a supermarket, recounted a recent incident whereby he had been assaulted by a shoplifter. Similar references to work-related risks were evident in the women's risk narratives. Sarah, Karen and Hannah (Focus Group 3) discussed experiences of having encountered shoplifting or threatening behaviour while undertaking shop-work. Sarah, who also worked in an off-licence, saw this as especially problematic, speaking of her experiences of being robbed and of being harassed by under-age teenagers to whom she had refused to sell alcohol. The workplace clearly constituted an important site of risk for these young men and women. It also constituted a practice symbolic of youth-to-adult transition, encounters with related risk practices and the degree of responsibility that employment entailed working to distinguish these young men and women from those younger, less mature and responsible than themselves.

Implicit in these narratives then was the construction of certain risk practices as symbolic markers of youth-to-adult transition. Many were associated with younger people and were constructed as practices they were less inclined to engage with on account of their age. Indeed, narratives were replete with moral condemnations of young people who do engage in such risk practices. Where such risk practices did feature, the individuals concerned asserted their ability for making rational risk calculations. As such, throughout their risk narratives these young people sought to position themselves as more mature and morally responsible individuals, as men or women who were, or close to being, adult.

Conclusion

Recent years have witnessed an intensification of concern over youth and risk, especially in respect of the problematisation of youth and youth-to-adult transitions. Much current research, however, focuses primarily on either the extent of young people's engagement in risky practices or on the numerous structural risks encountered as young people make their transitions towards independent adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; 2007). It is only relatively recently that attention has been directed towards young people's own definitions and understandings of risk, how these vary according to wider social and cultural factors, and how risks are related to processes associated with becoming adult (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2011). My research contributes to these more recent discussions by highlighting how risks are implicated in processes of identity work. As I have shown, risks were experienced and understood in different ways according to the age of the person, and were used to express and produce age-based distinctions as young people negotiate their way towards adulthood.

In discussing media representations of risky youth and their own encounters with young people my participants, perhaps unsurprisingly, often appeared quite sympathetic: news media reports were criticised for largely misrepresenting youth while young people were presented as being relatively unproblematic. As such, initially at least, young people appeared to contest dominant governmental youth risk discourses. Yet, as risk narratives unfolded through conversational interactions, and as attention focused more extensively on other youths, the young people, especially

those aged 19-24, were found to express more critical views. Further, identifying more closely with dominant governmental youth risk discourses, the young people associated other risky youth with practices such as alcohol, drug-use, hanging around in gangs and even the wearing of certain clothes. Conversely, while constructing *other* young people as risky, many of my participants typically positioned themselves as non-risky. The younger people often struggled to identify aspects of their everyday lives as risky, focusing instead on relatively benign practices. Many of the 16-18 year-olds *did* acknowledge engagement in various risky practices, especially those related to alcohol consumption: but these were justified on account of their ability to manage or avoid associated risks. For their part, the older youths claimed to have *outgrown* many youth risks, typically asserting that they now engaged in more responsible practices associated with becoming or being adult. In this respect, my data broadly echo Henderson et al's., (2007) observation that young people's attitudes towards drug-use and alcohol alter as they move into early adulthood.

A further, and related, issue to arise from this concerns the extent to which reflexive positioning as non-risky was bound up with culturally meaningful understandings of youth-to-adult transition. This took several forms. On the one hand, as noted above, different practices were understood and experienced as risk in different ways according to the age of the person. There was, of course, some overlap between the age cohorts: yet these broad patterns of practice were clearly in evidence. Secondly, young people were often at pains to present themselves as adopting a mature and responsible position towards risky practices, frequently distinguishing themselves from *younger* people whom they positioned as risky, and presenting themselves as having outgrown many risk practices engaged in when younger. Such discursive

positioning was often contradicted by accounts of actual risk-taking practices as revealed in focused discussions. Yet, the emphasis on having developed a mature and responsible stance towards certain risky practices was a powerful theme to emerge from my data. In this respect, understandings of risk were found to operate as forms of symbolic capital: knowledges and competencies around various risk practices constituted markers of age-based distinctions which were invoked as part of the process of making the transition through youth and into adulthood (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Thomson, 2011).

My investigation shows that young people's experiences and understandings of risks and risky youth are intrinsically bound up with culturally related understandings of what it means to be/become adult. It also demonstrates that there is often dissonance between how young people view the risk practices of others and how they see themselves. This general tendency to disidentify with dominant governmental youth risk discourses and to associate youth risks with *other*, particularly younger people has important implications for processes of identity work, especially as regards the production and maintenance of age-based distinctions. With these findings I therefore make an important contribution to recent research exploring the complex relationships between youth, risk and identity.

The risk narratives co-produced by young people occupying different age locations were found to be patterned in important ways. Nonetheless, there was also evidence of overlaps between, and contradictions within, different age groups. As such, narratives indicated that although there was a strong correspondence between young people, risk and age, this was not a straight-forward one. Material experiences and

understandings of risk, as well as how risks were mobilised as forms of symbolic capital in the reproduction of age-based distinctions and youth-to-adult transitions, were complexly nuanced by specific interactions of age with class and neighbourhood, ethnicity and, as I discuss in the next chapters, gender.

Introduction: Young Femininities and Risk

Writing in 1976 Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber noted that while present in youth culture, young women were largely invisible. Media and academic interest lay mainly with male dominated youth subcultures while young women, consigned primarily to the domestic sphere and the bedroom culture or to the margins of youth clubs, often went unnoticed (McRobbie and Garber, 1976 in McRobbie, 1991). Forty years on and arguably things have changed considerably. Major social, economic and cultural changes in late modernity have altered what it means to be young and female, enabling young women to *appear* (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). There is now much greater fluidity in what femininity means (McRobbie, 1994) and young women now take an active role as members of the contemporary risk generation (France, 2007).

Taken at face value, the movement of young women from the margins to the centre of youth culture provides evidence of the processes of detraditionalisation and individualisation associated with late modernity: gender, in this sense, is losing its determining influence (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Certainly, broader trends in terms of a range of cultural practices indicate that gender differences are becoming less evident (Bennett et al., 2009). This is especially so in respect of young women's participation in a range of risk practices which were once regarded as the sole preserve of young men. At its most spectacular level this is seen in the night-time

leisure economy where risk practices associated with alcohol and drugs have become core elements of a wider youth culture (Winlow and Hall, 2006; France, 2007) in which young women play a pivotal role. Young women's risk practices in this context exhibit a degree of convergence with those more conventionally associated with young men and masculinities; a process of cultural masculinisation seemingly having resulted in many routinely engaging in practices such as drinking to excess, using drugs, getting into fights, having casual sex, getting arrested by the police and so forth (McRobbie, 2005; 2009; McDowell, 2009; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). Such developments can be seen as being part and parcel of the 'new girl order' (Nayak and Kelhily, 2008: 52) informed by a 'girl power' discourse (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005:18) which articulates a new femininity based on a challenge to traditional notions of feminine passivity and vulnerability and suggests to young women that they can do what they want as active members of a consumer culture, including engagement in a range of risk-related practices.

Yet, despite such changes it would be wrong to say that youth culture is a democratised zone (Henderson et al., 2007) in which young women's risk-taking practices are viewed in the same terms as those of young men. Governmental youth risk discourses counter the girl power discourse by continuing to construct young women and their risk practices through a traditional lens of feminine respectability (Skeggs, 1997; Green and Singleton, 2006). Historically, respectability has been the mode of femininity used by the middle-classes to position working-class women as 'dangerous, polluting, threatening, revolutionary, pathological and without respect' (Skeggs, 1997:1). More recently, it has been mobilised as part of a more general backlash against the new girl order, many risk practices being delegitimised as

symbolic markers of an acceptable femininity (McRobbie, 2009). As I discussed in Chapter Three, news media and other governmental youth risk discourses routinely scrutinise young women for transgressions of feminine respectability: 'inappropriate' conduct, demeanour and style are chastised, extensive concern is expressed over their alcohol consumption, and familiar images of the risks of drug-related deaths or of falling prey to male perpetrators remain widespread (Henderson et al., 2007; McRobbie, 2009). The effect of this is that young women's engagement in risky practices is continuously countered by attempts to reorganise youth cultural practices in highly gendered terms which mobilise familiar binaries of 'good' and 'bad' femininity (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005). Evidence of this can be found in the routine condemnation of those seen to step outside the bounds of feminine respectability, terms such as 'ladette' aligning young women who engage in risky drinking with irresponsible young men (Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). These understandings of young women were echoed in some of my interviews with professionals working with young people. For example, both Richard and Stephen (Head teachers) spoke of young women's vulnerability when drinking and Keith, who managed the policing of Liverpool's city centre, stressed that young women's drinking put them at risk of crime and sexual assault.

What all of this suggests is that, while girls and young women may indeed occupy a far more pivotal role in youth culture than did their mothers and grandmothers, their presence is regulated by a series of strongly gendered governmental discourses that construct them as being 'at risk'. As Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kelhily (2008:61) express it, these discourses 'articulate a set of moral and social concerns in relation to young women such as: teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease; drug

taking; involvement in crime and particularly young women's involvement in gangs and violent crime.'

These (re)constructions of respectable femininity are often taken up by girls and young women themselves, many of who retain deep-seated investments in conventional images of masculinity and femininity (McNay, 1999). This can be found in their socially embedded and culturally meaningful understandings of what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate risk practice for men and women (Crawshaw, 2004; Green and Singleton, 2006). For instance, young women's engagement in certain risk practices can enable them to accomplish a range of traditional and non-traditional femininities (Measham, 2002); but specific modes of alcohol consumption often remain premised on more traditional representations of masculinity and femininity (Sheehan and Ridge, 2001; France, 2007), while practices associated with the 'ladette' are profoundly intertwined with notions of normative (hetero)sexual desirability and physical attractiveness (Measham, 2002; McRobbie, 2005; 2009).

Further, risk remains bound up with conventional gender power relations. Public spaces and places used for youth leisure purposes have long since been understood and experienced as potentially dangerous and violent for young women (Pain, 2001; Seabrook and Green, 2004; Green and Singleton, 2006): yet, developments in the night-time economy, coupled with the hyper-sexuality which underpins ladette culture, are often understood as having further intensified women's vulnerability to violence and old fashioned sexist insults and hostility (Winlow and Hall, 2006; McRobbie, 2009). As such, young women's engagement in risk practices more traditionally

associated with men and masculinity does not reflect the undoing of gender; rather the gender order is being reconfigured in ways which continue to constrain and regulate young women and their risk practices, reworking conventional hierarchical power relations (Adkins, 2002).

A further significant point is that not all young women understand or encounter risk practices in the same ways. As noted previously, many risk practices are found to be unequally distributed according to age, class, ethnicity and locality (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; France, 2007). Related, 'becoming, practising and doing femininity are very different things for women of different classes, races, ages and nations' (Skeggs, 1997:98; Walkerdine et al., 2001) and while many may identify with dominant conceptions of respectable femininity, they may also contest or renegotiate this in different ways according to their social locations and the various material, cultural, social and symbolic resources that are available to them (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson, 2011). For instance, young women may use their friendship and peer groups as sites of support and solidarity which can enable them to negotiate their femininities in the face of the demands placed on them by a sexist and patriarchal society (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Hey, 1997). Such resources may enable young women to contest and renegotiate their gendered identities, refusing the delegitimisation of certain risk practices as symbolic markers of respectable femininity by privileging their own risk hierarchies (Green and Singleton, 2006) and developing their own understandings of femininity and sexual propriety (Thomson, 2011). As such, what it means to be feminine and how this relates to understandings and practices of risk varies according to young women's social location and the various

resources that are available to them.

What current youth studies research suggests, therefore, is that while the youth cultural landscape and late modern consumer culture are often portrayed as democratised zones in which gender is no longer a barrier to participation (Henderson et al., 2007), the reality is far more complex. Young women's relationship with risk is variously constrained or enabled by a range of material, discursive, social and cultural factors which, in turn, work to define young femininities in particular ways (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005).

In this chapter I contribute to current research using data generated in focus groups with girls and young women occupying different social positions and living in different neighbourhoods in Liverpool (Appendix 1). I show that girls and young women often experienced and understood risk in terms of threats or hazards posed by others in particular neighbourhood spaces or other sites of youth leisure. Risks were also found to be discussed in highly gendered terms in that it was largely young men who were deemed to pose the greatest threat. Risk was also discussed in terms of practices which carry the potential for causing some form of personal harm, several of the young women focusing on experiences of active risk-taking, particularly as regards alcohol consumption. However, in this respect, there was marked variation depending on intersections of gender with other axes of identity. Building on these accounts, I also show how, through the processes of conversational interaction generated in the focus group setting, participants were found to produce and reproduce their feminine subject positions in ways that variously conformed to, negotiated or contested

dominant constructions of normative femininity implied by governmental youth risk discourses. In this respect, varying experiences and understandings of risk which reflect the different material, social, cultural and symbolic resources available to these girls and young women were found to have a range of implications for the situated accomplishments of feminine identities.

'Many people just don't know when to stop drinking': Alcohol, Drugs and Femininities

Many of the young women spoke of alcohol consumption and drug-use as everyday risk practices. How these risk practices were discussed varied according to position in social space. In all narratives alcohol and drug-use were constructed as a form of symbolic capital, used to express distinctions between respectable and non-respectable femininities. Through these narratives the women reproduced their feminine identities in complex, fluid and often ambivalent ways, distinguishing respectable from non-respectable femininity and identifying with, contesting or negotiating normative gender discourses to accomplish a range of traditional and/or non-traditional feminine subject positions.

For some it was less what was said of alcohol and drug-use that was significant, but what was *not* said. Working-class women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 16) said nothing of alcohol consumption or drug-use. Several women in this group were practicing Muslims and it is probable that absences were due to these

practices simply not featuring in their everyday lives. Alternatively, however, it is possible that absences were consequent upon such topics being deemed non-permissible in a group context; threats of gossip which could lead to information getting back to their family, or revelations of engagement in certain risky practices to other Muslim women both carrying the risk of undermining their credibility as traditional and respectable women and potentially rendering them silent on such matters. Also, my own positionality may have inhibited discussions, the women maybe feeling uncomfortable discussing such topics with an older, white male. Either way, the effect was that in eliding talk of such risks, in the context of the focus group setting the women presented their feminine subjectivities in relatively conventional terms of respectability.

Many of the white women also discussed these risk practices in ways which cited and reproduced dominant governmental youth risk and gender discourses. Drawing on previous practices and understandings of risk generated by their class location, several middle-class 16-18 year-olds (Focus Group 10) asserted that alcohol consumption, particularly in city centre clubs and bars, was a risk practice only rarely engaged in. Gemma and Georgina asserted that they did not drink and that they never went into the city centre. Gemma expressed this in terms which reflected her age as a young woman who was not yet adult, claiming that she would get into trouble if she went out drinking and saying that she would not engage in such practices as 'I'm only sixteen'. This co-produced risk narrative also exhibited a moral condemnation of excessive drinking, those engaging in such practices being interactively positioned as lacking responsibility and respectability:

Focus Group 10:

Gemma: Many people don't know when to stop drinking either, like some of my friends don't know when to stop drinking

Kiera: Some people just go out just solely to get drunk, that's their aim of a night whereas me, I'm just like 'enjoy yourselves' and just like have a good time with your mates and some people go 'right, I'm goin' to drink this much tonight and I'm gonna get completely bladdered, I'm not gonna be able to remember what's gonna go off, what's going on whatever'

In this conversational moment, excessive alcohol consumption was constructed as a devalued form of symbolic capital through which the young women disidentified from the popular image of the binge drinking ladette mobilised by governmental youth risk discourses. By expressing their own moral judgements of alcohol consumption and, by extension, those who participate in such practices, they engaged in boundary work, presenting their feminine subject positions as respectable, sensible and responsible and distinguishing themselves from those who do partake in excessive drinking. This was reinforced by Jenny's construction of excessive drinking as 'a waste of time' and Gemma's claim that there were 'other ways of having fun'.

Reflecting different age and class positions, as well as different patterns of socialisation, other young women narrated alcohol risks, and thereby, reproduced feminine subjectivities, in more ambivalent terms. The older white, middle-class, women (Focus Group 3) stated that while they did consume alcohol, this was only ever in moderation and on an infrequent basis. Again, there was a general disidentification from the image of the binge drinking ladette and their risk narrative was infused with understandings of moderate alcohol consumption as being more

typical of their everyday lives. As I discussed in the previous chapter, for many, alcohol was understood in terms of adult oriented practices such as going to pubs for quiet drinks with boyfriends or drinking wine with meals. Where drinking did take place this was said to be for enjoyment rather than getting drunk:

Focus Group 3:

Sarah: I don't want to go out and binge drink - I'd rather have a glass of wine and enjoy it, of a night than go out and just because after that its, like you said [to Hannah] its like the feeling of not being in control, not knowing what I was doing

Hannah and Sarah spoke of their aversion to getting drunk, claiming that they felt it important to remain in control, while Hannah constructed herself as a 'good drinker' who was aware of her limits. Sarah did acknowledge drinking on most evenings, but defended this on account of it being 'just a couple of glasses of red wine when I'm cooking, to relax me'; the utterance 'just' here operating to justify her own drinking to herself and to counter the possibility of her consumption patterns being seen as problematic by others in the group. In discussing alcohol-related risks in these terms these women reproduced feminine subject positions shaped by discourses of respectability. Such positioning was in this respect informed by localised cultural understandings of maturity and experiences related to specific interactions of gender with age and class.

Yet, despite numerous claims to be sensible drinkers, accounts of excessive or problem drinking did emerge. Contrary to her attempts to downplay the extent of her drinking, for instance, Sarah's claim to consume a 'couple of glasses of red wine' on

most evenings actually worked to position her as a subject of problematising discourses (two glasses of wine exceeding recommended daily limits for women). Karen and Rebecca also sought to play down the significance of their drinking by claiming to go out infrequently: yet, both went on to state that when they did go out then they tended to drink excessively. Karen said of her drinking that: 'I don't know when to stop' and Rebecca referred to having recently 'drank loads in one session'. In these conversational moments the women produced a more ambivalent femininity: admissions of excessive drinking mobilised an 'active girl' discourse, simultaneously working to position the women as the problematised subjects of governmental youth risk discourses. At the same time, however, the women sought to distance themselves from the image of the female binge drinker, positioning themselves as non-problematic by claiming to be only *occasional* heavy drinkers.

This risk narrative was especially illustrative of the benefits of using the focus group method to explore the complexity of the relationship between youth, risk and identity. These young women were evidently at considerable ease in discussing everyday risk practices, the value of 'safety in numbers' clearly being apparent. As such, they co-produced a rich risk narrative concerning their experiences of, and attitudes towards, alcohol consumption and related practices. The women discussed these issues in ways that had implications for how they positioned themselves and others in feminine subject positions. In particular, in swapping anecdotes, sharing experiences and building on each other's accounts, the women engaged in quite dynamic interactions, through which their own understandings of alcohol-related risks were made visible. This, in turn, illustrated how feminine positions were taken up and negotiated in the course of conversational interactions, the women variously shifting between

respectable, risk-averse and more active, risk-taking femininities as they discussed risk.

Both the benefits of using focus groups as a site for exploring processes of identity work and how feminine subject positions are taken up, negotiated or contested was especially evident in other groups of young women. Again reflecting how the focus group can empower participants to discuss certain topics, several young women identified alcohol consumption and related practices as being common aspects of their everyday lives. Some of the 16-18 year olds (Focus Group 4) occupied a somewhat ambiguous class location in that, while middle-class by NS-SEG criteria, they lived in neighbourhoods regarded as working-class according to Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking (see Chapter Eight for discussion). For these young women, alcohol consumption, going to birthday parties or frequenting city centre clubs and bars were constructed as routine, weekly events. As Zoë put it: 'there's parties every week'. In discussing these experiences, they made frequent references to drinking excessively and discussed the threats of assault which they were exposed to when drunk. Working-class 16-18 year-olds (Focus Group 6) also constructed drinking as an especially risky aspect of their lifestyle. Ashlea, Gemma, Katrina and Sara, all of whom had only recently turned 16, spoke of regularly consuming strong spirits in bars or at friends' houses. Ashlea said she often sneaked out of her home late at night to meet with friends to go drinking and both she and others referred to occasions when being drunk had led to them being sick or collapsing, or to having accidents which had resulted in their being taken to hospital.

Reflecting both different materialities of risk associated with the socio-economic

context in which they lived and their understandings of femininity at the intersection of gender with class and age, these young women co-produced risk narratives which were clearly informed by an 'active girl' discourse (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005). In doing so, they contested normative understandings of respectable femininity implicit in governmental youth risk discourses. Yet, at the same time, they also typically sought to renegotiate their feminine subject positions, laying claim to being responsible and respectable in *other*, culturally acceptable ways. For instance, Leah, Emma, Rebecca and Hannah (Focus Group 4) constructed drinking at private parties as a preferred practice on account of it being safer than in clubs or bars: this was due to the fact that, as Hannah stated, 'cos it's all your mates there'. In this respect, the women made a clear distinction between what they considered to be risky and safer drinking practices, although such a distinction was not always borne out by evidence elsewhere in their narrative. They also spoke about their proclivity for looking after one another when drinking and their ability to make rational judgements around personal safety. In this instance, these women acknowledged regularly consuming alcohol, but as doing so in ways that they deemed to be responsible. Ashlea, Gemma, Katrina and Sara (Focus Group 6) likewise spoke of adopting a more responsible approach to drinking, including their 'rules of the night' which they had devised as a means of looking after each other (see below). Again this represented an attempt to reflexively position themselves as responsible young women, albeit in ways which run counter to dominant governmental youth risk discourses.

This negotiated positioning as respectable and responsible young women was strengthened through their co-produced narratives relating to drugs. The use of cannabis, ecstasy or cocaine was constructed as a risk practice frequently

encountered when attending clubs, bars or house parties. Yet, all expressed a strong antipathy towards drug-use. Leah, Lorna and Zoë (Focus Group 4) proclaimed that drugs scared them, while Hannah recounted an occasion when a male friend had put cocaine on the back of her hand which had made her 'really angry'. Rebecca also asserted her hostility to drug-use, referring to a recent occasion when she had berated a friend for using ecstasy:

Focus Group 4:

Rebecca: My friend, erm took ecstasy the other week and I was 'oh my God!' I would have battered her, and erm, but erm I was like, 'you could have died' and some people don't realise, because it's always in the newspaper that like people have taken ecstasy, just one an' you can die from it and they didn't know that ...

Here, Rebecca, citing dominant governmental discourses, roundly condemned the use of ecstasy, simultaneously positioning herself as somebody who is both knowledgeable about the drug and its potential health risks, and responsible, marked by her claim to be looking after the well-being of her friend. Ashlea (Focus Group 6) did acknowledge having smoked cannabis in the past, but went on to claim that a recent incident in which her drink had been spiked had 'put me off drugs for life'. This prompted a more general discussion in which they went on to criticise drug-use. As I discuss in Chapter Eight, much of this narrative was infused with the language of class, working to reproduce particular class-based distinctions. At the same time, however, in morally condemning drug-use and drug-users, the women's narrative also worked to position them as relatively responsible and respectable young women. In the case of both of these groups, their tendency to identify with an active girl

discourse through talk of experiences and understandings of alcohol consumption was tempered by claims to be responsible and respectable in other aspects of their everyday lives. Again, this highlights the complexity of the relationship between youth, risk and identity, especially as regards how subject positions are identified with, negotiated and contested through processes of conversational interaction.

Alcohol and drug-use are risk practices central to dominant governmental youth risk discourses. These discourses, coupled with broader gender discourses, construct these risk practices in ways which exhort young women to position themselves in terms of a respectable and responsible femininity. Certainly, in the course of their risk narratives, some of the young women positioned themselves quite unambiguously in these terms. For others, however, such positioning was more complex. Young women of different ages, from different class and ethnic backgrounds and living in other neighbourhoods often discussed these risks in alternative ways. Related, many exhibited contrary, even ambivalent, ways of being responsible and respectable in respect of alcohol and drug-use. Even for those proclaiming to frequently engage in risky drinking, certain alcohol-related practices and drug-use were constructed as devalued symbolic practices through which they expressed and reproduced their own understandings of respectable and non-respectable femininity. As such, my investigation illustrates that while risk narratives regarding alcohol and drug-use were broadly patterned according to gender, such patterns were also related to other social locations in ways which had further implications for understanding the relationships between young women and risk.

‘Lads will really annoy the hell out of you’: Risky Spaces and Risky Men

Many young women associated risk with threats of physical assault or harassment. These were associated with certain places and spaces which were understood in highly gendered terms. However, reflecting differential relations with the materiality of risk in their respective neighbourhoods and different understandings of risk practices at the intersections of gender, age, class and ethnicity, how these threats were experienced and understood were found to vary.

For most of the white women, public and private spaces associated with drinking were understood as being especially risky. A small number referred to experiences of fights with other women. In particular, Zoë (Focus Group 4) spoke of an occasion in a bar where another young woman had wanted to fight with her for ‘no apparent reason’, while Leah observed that ‘If you look at a girl in the wrong way it can backfire’, resulting in an argument or even a fight. Such references to conflict with other women were, however, rare and physical violence was more typically viewed as being the preserve of young men. More common were references to previous experiences and a more general expectation of being sexually harassed or assaulted by young men. In discussing such risks, participants reproduced dominant constructions of young women as being potential victims of actual and/or symbolic sexualised violence.

Amongst the older women (Focus Group 3), Hannah and Karen spoke of routinely being sexually harassed when in bars or clubs. Hannah discussed these ‘horrible

situations' in which lads would be 'really full on' and 'annoy the hell out of you'. Karen developed this, saying that every time she went out lads would touch her or 'slap your bum' and Hannah recalled a recent incident when a male stranger had untied a bow on her dress, leaving her partially exposed. Such acts of actual and symbolic violence were clearly resented by the women. Karen expressed disdain at men who 'just because we are a girl they think they have got the right to do that to you' and Hannah asserted how such acts made her very angry; as she stated: 'I feel like kicking them in the balls'. The women claimed that such experiences had left them tired and wary of drinking in the city centre and, as I discussed in the previous chapter, as tending to engage in other, more adult-oriented, leisure practices. As such, incidents of sexual harassment experienced when socialising in clubs and bars, coupled with a more mature stance towards risk more generally, resulted in these women positioning themselves in terms of a risk-averse femininity.

Several of the white, middle-class 16-18 year-olds also constructed city centre clubs and bars as risky places. Emma, Leah and Rebecca (Focus Group 4) spoke graphically of being on the receiving end of lewd and suggestive comments from 'pervy doormen' when waiting to enter night clubs: indeed, this form of symbolic violence was constructed very much as a normal aspect of nights out in the city centre. These women also spoke of the risks of assault associated with using private hire taxis when returning home. Emma said she was constantly warned of the dangers of using private hire taxis by her father (himself a taxi-driver) and Leah asserted that 'anything could happen' when you are drunk. Again, the young women positioned themselves within a governmental youth risk discourse which constructs

young women as vulnerable to sexual assault and harassment, though, as I discuss below, such positioning was sometimes ambiguous.

White, working-class, women (Focus Group 6) also referred to the risk of harassment or assault when out drinking. However, while these young women, all of whom had only recently turned 16, did occasionally visit clubs or bars, most of their drinking took place at friends' houses or in private parties. As such, it was these spaces that were deemed to pose the greater risk. The extent of such risk was discussed in some detail by Ashlea. Ashlea was a dissonant case in that she tended to position herself as an excessive risk-taker, especially with respect to alcohol consumption. Reflecting her comfort with the research setting, enhanced no doubt by the presence of several close friends, Ashlea produced a rich, somewhat candid, account of two incidents in which she had been vulnerable to, or even victim of, sexual assault. The first of these involving her then boyfriend spiking her drink with ecstasy at a party so as to 'have sex with me basically'; the second concerning an occasion when she had awoken in a strange man's bed wearing only her underwear after having been drunk the previous night. Ashlea described the first incident as having made her feel 'really, really horrible', a claim supported by her friend Gemma who said that this had left Ashlea unable to sleep properly for several weeks afterwards. Regarding the latter incident, Ashlea believed that while she may have been sexually assaulted she did not know this for certain and hence had not reported it to police. These experiences were atypical in that none of the other women claimed to have been in such a vulnerable situation. But they nevertheless struck a resounding chord, several expressing knowledge of friends who had had very similar experiences. Sara said she had several friends who thought they may have been raped when drunk, while

Sophie outlined an incident at a private party when a friend who had passed-out due to being drunk awoke to find a male friend trying to molest her. Actual and/or symbolic violence posed by men was, in this respect, constructed as a significant feature of the everyday lives of these young women.

Accounts of sexual harassment or assault were also associated with other places and spaces across the city. This gendered understanding of risk reverberated across the groups, though again, the specific form and content of narratives often varied. Becky and Leah (Focus Group 4) who, as noted previously, inhabited a rather ambiguous class position, spoke of being sexually harassed by young black men when walking through parts of inner-city Liverpool. Rebecca said that a police officer friend had advised her to avoid this same area due to a spate of sexual assaults. Other white, middle-class, women (Focus Group 10), who lived in more affluent areas, said nothing of actual experiences of sexual harassment or assault. Instead, much of their narrative related to the *perceived* risks associated with their neighbourhood and their journey to and from school. Kate spoke of an occasion where she thought she was being followed by a man through a subway and a second when walking alone past a group of young men had made her feel 'scared of them taking my phone'. Jenny likewise spoke of feeling unsafe when taking short cuts through alleyways and said that she often felt vulnerable when waiting alone at bus-stops; and Annemarie talked of walking through a local park at night which she felt had been 'quite dangerous'. However, these women often struggled to identify aspects of everyday life as being risky and as such tended to discuss anecdotal accounts of *other* young women's experiences of assault or harassment. Jenny and Kiera, for example, recounted stories involving a young woman having her hair set on fire by a group of male youths

and of a friend who was 'nearly mugged'. Nonetheless, such anecdotal accounts, coupled with the brief references to actual incidents, worked to reflexively position them less ambiguously as subjects of governmental youth risk discourses which constructs young women as potentially at risk of sexualised assault or harassment or, indeed, violent crime.

Working-class women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds also spoke of the potential for harassment or assault in certain places and spaces. However, as I explore in Chapter Seven, their focus was less with sexual harassment or assault and very much with experiences of racial abuse. Further, where such risks were discussed then emphases lay with these being associated with young men rather than women. For instance, my question as to whether they ever felt threatened by knife crime in their neighbourhood elicited the following response:

Focus Group 16:

Ruksana: Not as a girl, no!

Amita: It's boys

Anila: When things happen it's lads not girls

Ruksana: I mean I feel scared for like someone like abusing me and like shouting abuse cos that's just like still not as nice y'know what I mean, but you'd be more scared as a lad

Anila: If we if we were to get stabbed or hurt in some way it would be by a girl, it wouldn't be a boy

Raima: A boy wouldn't do it to a girl

Anila: And girls, girls wouldn't carry knives, they just fight you normally, they wouldn't even do that

In this conversational moment the women drew upon previous experiences and

understandings of violence which reflected specific interactions of gender with class, ethnicity and neighbourhood. The women positioned themselves as *not* being at risk of male violence and reproduced their femininity in relatively conventional terms as non-violent. Risk practices relating to violence and knife crime were understood as a form of symbolic capital, one used to distinguish a more aggressive masculinity from a non-aggressive femininity. Further, in rejecting any association with violence, the women reflexively positioned themselves as subjects of governmental youth risk discourses which exhort young women to be responsible and respectable, a positioning augmented by the absence of reference in their narrative to engagement with risk practices relating to alcohol and drugs.

While young women often associated risk with specific spaces and places, particularly with threats of harassment or assault, narratives again exhibited variations according to the socio-economic context of everyday life and position in social space. These different experiences and localised understandings of risk in turn informed the content and form of risk narratives which, as I discuss in the next section, had a range of implications for how feminine identities were reproduced, negotiated and contested.

'If she gets too drunk I'll stop drinking and look after her': Risk-taking and the Negotiation of Feminine Identities

Risk narratives drawing upon prior experiences and a specific cultural logic of risk practice informed the ways in which young women accomplished their feminine

subject positions. Working-class women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 16) and some of the white, middle-class, women (Focus Group 10) either said little of active engagement with risk practices, or simply did not refer to these at all. In this respect, these women co-produced risk narratives in which both what was discussed and what was omitted worked to reflexively position them quite unambiguously as risk-averse, respectable and responsible, young women. For the most part, however, young women produced and reproduced femininities in more complex and ambivalent ways, contesting and negotiating their gendered identities in discussing prior experiences and understandings of risk.

This was evident in accounts of strategies for staying safe in risky spaces. Working-class women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 16), who equated risk with racism, spoke simply of avoiding areas where this was likely to be encountered. By contrast, Kate, Georgina and Kiera (Focus Group 10) discussed a range of safety strategies used when waiting alone at bus-stops, such as standing close to other people so they appeared to be accompanied. Referring to feeling vulnerable to having her bag snatched when sitting on a bus, Denise claimed to sit in a position that would enable her to trip-up any potential assailant, and Gemma said that if she had her hockey stick with her then she would carry it in such a way that she could use it to defend herself should somebody try to attack her. In these narratives the women again reiterated a familiar gender discourse which positions young women as potential victims of male assault. Yet, they also reproduced their feminine subjectivity in ways which refused any simple notion of female passivity, positioning themselves as women individually responsible for their own safety and

who were capable of protecting themselves, including, if necessary, through use of physical force.

Safety strategies were also discussed in ways understood as helping to inoculate women from threats posed by men in city centre clubs and bars. Many discussed how their friendship groups had developed various means for looking after one another. Amongst the older, middle-class women (Focus Group 3), Hannah and Rebecca spoke of using a series of prearranged codes to alert one another if they were being harassed by young men on those rare occasions that they went clubbing. This included tactics such as 'touching your hair' or asking others to 'go the toilet', or other strategies, such as asking male friends to 'pretend to be your brother or boyfriend'. They also spoke of their preference for either going clubbing in groups which included boyfriends and male friends or, if out with other women only, going to a local gay club which they regarded as 'safer'. Rebecca also noted the advantages of only going clubbing as part of a group which included friends who were gay: as she put it; 'half the girls are lesbians and quite scary anyway so people tend to leave us alone'. In these respects, the older women's resentment and frustration at the symbolic violence experienced when in clubs and bars was translated into quite complex defensive strategies. Talking about risk management in these terms, they reflexively positioned themselves as responsible, risk-averse, young women who were able to control and resist forms of symbolic violence perpetrated by men. And yet, somewhat contradictorily, by noting they sometimes relied on male friends to shield them from other men, they simultaneously drew on more traditional constructions of gender to position themselves as young women who need men to 'protect' them. Nonetheless, their claims to 'use' men in this way was first and foremost regarded as a strategy

aimed at inoculating them from risks associated with sexual harassment; this in turn, allowed them to embrace a more active, risk-taking, femininity while simultaneously retaining a relatively conventional understanding of feminine respectability.

Women occupying other social locations also contested and renegotiated normative gender positions through talking of similar risk management strategies, albeit ones that did not elicit the support of male friends. White, middle-class, 16-18 year-olds living in working-class neighbourhoods (Focus Group 4) discussed strategies that facilitated a more active engagement in risky alcohol consumption practices:

Focus Group 4:

Emma: [...] like if we go to town, even if it's with some people, me and Zoë like look after each other, we make sure, if she gets too drunk I'll stop drinking and look after her and if I get too drunk she'll do the same but like erm

Zoë: Laughs

Dave: What if you both get too drunk?

Emma: It's never happened, we've always been able to get home, we're always like drunk-ish

Zoë: We're safe-ish

Emma: We've always got our brains working so we know what we're doing but like - yeah, we always look after each other [...]

Emphasis lay with how they sought to stay safe through the provision of reciprocal support in ways which allowed one of them to drink excessively. While, on one level, this acknowledgment of excessive drinking worked to position these women as subjects of governmental youth risk discourses, their assertions of looking after each other effectively challenged this. Rather, positioning themselves as rational

calculators of risk, the women claimed to each moderate their own alcohol consumption in recognition that their friend may need assistance; this being possible so long as they were only, in Emma's words, 'drunkish'. In this way, Zoë and Emma again not only contested governmental youth risk discourses, but also sought to position themselves as respectable and responsible young women who, nonetheless, embraced an active girl discourse.

Several of the white, working-class, women (Focus Group 6) also discussed how prior experiences of getting drunk had led them to devise their own safety strategy used when going out drinking:

Focus Group 6:

Gemma: This is just our rules of the night when we go out clubbing or whatever. Never put your bag down! Never put your drink down! If, if anyone buys you a drink you have to go to the bar with them and pick it up yourself! Never take your shoes off! Never think you can limbo and never disappear!

Such 'rules' were claimed to be taken seriously. Ashlea noted that Gemma frequently admonished those who failed to adhere to them, illustrating this with reference to a recent occasion when having gone to the toilet without giving due notification, she promptly received a phone call from Gemma checking on her whereabouts. Claims to have devised their own risk-management strategy again worked to position these young women as relatively respectably and responsibly feminine. Yet, indicating how focus groups can allow for different, even contradictory, experiences and understandings to come to the fore, further references to excessive drinking, being sick, passing out and being exposed to, or even victim of, sexual assault all worked to

undermine this positioning. Indeed, at such points in their narrative the women tended to position themselves quite unambiguously as subjects of problematising youth risk discourses.

Discussions of risk management strategies also included accounts of how the young women stayed safe when returning home from the city centre. Some of the older women (Focus Group 3) spoke of how they would send text messages to one another so to ensure their safe arrival home. In a similar vein, Sophie (Focus Group 6), describing herself as 'the sensible one', claimed that she always took it upon herself to arrange for taxis and to make sure everybody arrived home safely by calling them on their mobile phones. A number of the white, middle-class, women (Focus Group 4) also asserted that risks associated with travelling home at night could be circumvented. In particular, discussing risks associated with using private taxis, Emma, Kate and Leah reiterated dominant youth risk discourse which constructs young women as being at-risk of assault by men. Yet, referring to prior experiences, which presumably entailed not having been harassed or assaulted, the women contested such a positioning. Not only was this attained via their assertion that private taxis were preferred on account of their cheapness and convenience, but also through their claims that sharing taxis afforded them safety in numbers and that they were in any case, able to judge the trustworthiness of taxi-drivers: Zoë claimed she could always tell if 'someone's dodgy' and Emma referred to a recent occasion when, being suspicious of a driver, she had changed taxis at Zoë's house rather than continue the journey alone.

In the course of co-producing risk narratives most of the women reproduced a femininity informed by deeply-embedded cultural and historical understandings of women as potential victims of male aggression (symbolic or actual). In doing so, they typically positioned themselves as *at-risk* women, identifying with the constructions of young women implicit in governmental youth risk discourses. Further, and related, many referred to using various risk management strategies which were predicated on reciprocal support afforded by the friendship group, a theme conspicuous by its absence in young men's risk narratives. Hence, only through their mutual interdependence on each other did many women feel protected from certain risks. In this respect, young women reproduced their feminine subject positions in relatively traditional terms of responsibility and respectability.

Yet, for many, it was this very support that enabled them to actively engage in forms of risky alcohol consumption. This was especially so for the working-class women, the older, middle-class women, and for those middle-class women living in more traditionally working-class neighbourhoods. Indeed, for these women, claims to be rational risk calculators who were able to make judgements of the relative riskiness of specific practices allowed them to embrace a more active girlhood while simultaneously re-working traditional notions of feminine respectability.

Nonetheless, whether it was in the absence of reference to active engagement in such risk practices (Focus Groups 10 and 16), or through the more explicit discussions of managed risk-taking noted above, the inference was clear: young women understood their participation in alcohol consumption and related socialisation practices as being constrained. Even for those who discussed their various risk-

management strategies which facilitated a more active, assertive, femininity, the very necessity of these strategies was testament to the fact that both particular risk practices and the forms of femininity available to young women, remain profoundly restricted by threats of actual and/or symbolic violence by men.

Conclusion

In recent decades a broad range of risk practices have become common aspects of young women's lifestyles more generally, while there have also been major shifts in what it means to be 'feminine'. However, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, current youth studies research suggests that girls' and young women's understandings of femininity and their experiences and understandings of risk continue to be shaped by a range of material, social and cultural factors which relate to the local contexts in which their everyday lives are experienced. In this respect, as Rachel Thomson asserts, 'changes in gender relations may not be as advanced, nor as simple, as some theorists of detraditionalisation suggest' (Thomson, 2011:43). This is borne out by the focus group data produced by girls and young women in my research.

Focused discussions of everyday risk practices illustrated the ways in which the material, social and cultural aspects of risk and gender remain intertwined. The emphasis was very much on the notion of external threats to personal safety. Almost exclusively, risk narratives drew upon dominant governmental youth risk discourses and their own risk culturally embedded discourses through which young women are

understood as the potential victims of male aggression. Risk was, in this respect, understood very much in relatively traditional gendered terms, regardless of the class, age or ethnicity of the person.

Discussions of other risk practices and the situated accomplishments of femininity were, however, found to vary depending on the different material, social and cultural resources available to the girls and young women according to their locality and position in social space. Young women from black or minority ethnic backgrounds and many of those from middle-class positions largely distanced themselves from active participation in risky youth practices. In doing so, they tended to position themselves quite unambiguously in terms of a traditional respectable, risk-averse, femininity (Skeggs, 1997). Conversely, working-class women, young middle-class women living in affluent working-class areas and older middle-class women all spoke extensively of their active engagement in certain youth risk practices, particularly alcohol consumption and related patterns of socialisation. Such discussions appeared to indicate that these women were contesting, even subverting, conventional constructions of respectable femininity implicit in dominant governmental risk discourses: that is to say, in these risk narratives young women seemingly positioned themselves in terms of a more assertive, active girl, discourse (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). Yet, even here, a clear gendered dimension remained intact. This was especially evident in references to their having to continuously resist or evade male violence or to use various strategies to stay safe when out drinking. Such strategies were premised on the reciprocal support afforded by the female friendship group (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Hey, 2001), a theme wholly absent in young men's risk narratives. As such, even where discussing risk

practices invocative of a more active and assertive femininity, the young women continued to negotiate and re-work conventional understandings of respectable femininity (Adkins, 2002; Reay, 2004).

Importantly, this study shows that even in a shifting social and cultural landscape where the relationship between youth, risk and femininity has changed, girls and young women continue to be constrained by dominant gender discourses which construct them as 'submissive bodies striving for respectability' (Green and Singleton, 2006:867) and by the material, social, cultural and symbolic factors related to locality and social space which shape opinions and identities (Henderson et al., 2007). As such, my investigation suggests that to fully understand the relationships between youth, risk and gender it is insufficient simply to trace changing patterns of risk-taking practices by young women. Rather, as other researchers have indicated, attention also needs to focus on the various ways these remain informed by culturally based understandings of feminine respectability and how these may vary according to the different social and cultural contexts that young people inhabit.

Introduction: Young Men, Masculinities and Risk

If recent years have seen young women becoming simultaneously more visible as members of youth culture and more prominent as targets of governmental youth risk discourses, the concern with young men and risk is both far more long-standing and more extensive. The social, cultural and economic changes of late modernity are often assumed to have produced a crisis of masculinity (for an overview of this discussion see Robb (2007) and Nayak and Kelhily (2008)). It is against this backdrop that evermore aspects of young men's lives are subjected to scrutiny, lest they engage in practices that threaten society more generally or pose a risk to themselves (Margo et al., 2006; Robb, 2007). Indeed, this association of young men with risk also means that young masculinity is itself generally regarded as a problem (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002).

Nonetheless, this problematisation of young men and masculinity often runs counter to particular culturally informed conceptions of an idealised masculinity. Reflecting different material, social and cultural contexts, certain forms of risk-taking have long since been associated with particular forms of masculinity. Much of the youth subcultural literature of the 1970s, for instance, saw various risk-taking practices such as heavy drinking, fighting and forms of law-breaking as representing an assertion of a traditional working-class masculinity (Cohen, P., 1972; Clarke et al., 1975; Hebdige, 1979).

Of course, not all young men engage in these sorts of practices. Indeed, reflecting the plurality and diversity of gender identities (Robb, 2007), there are numerous ways of doing masculinity. Yet, the association of some form of risk-taking with masculinity is a recurrent theme. This is developed most extensively by Raewyn Connell (1987, 2000, 2005) and her concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell's suggestion is that in any given social, historical or institutional context one masculine form, the hegemonic ideal, emerges as the most honoured way of being a man (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). This hegemonic ideal stands above subordinated or marginalised masculinities (such as black, middle-class or homosexual), and all femininities, and is typically associated with particular practices. In terms of late modern Western societies, such practices include: an aptitude for risk-taking; assertiveness; sporting ability; aggressive (hetero)sexual prowess; the capacity for fighting and violence; active engagement in drinking; a physically based and embodied toughness (Connell, 1987, 2000, 2005; Messerschmidt, 1993; Canaan, 1996; Brown, 2005).

Such forms of hegemonic masculinity have generally been associated with young white, working-class men who live in areas characterised by high unemployment, poverty and social inequality (Messerschmidt, 1993; 1994; Campbell, 1993; Stanko, 1994). This association remains prevalent in research. Paul Crawshaw's (2004) work on working-class males, for instance, asserts that risky practices, such as fighting, accord with a culturally embedded logic of practice which is generative of particular understandings and performances of masculinity. Practices relating to motor culture and car modification have also been demonstrated to be bound up with specific constructions of working-class masculinities and as marking points of distinction from

femininities (Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2007). However, the dominant form of masculinity, and, therefore, understandings of what risk practices are constitutive of this, are produced in the various social and cultural context in which boys and young men are located (Robb, 2007). As such, not all boys and young men understand such risky practices in the same terms; nor do all identify with, or even hope to attain, hegemonic masculine status (Connell, 1987, 2000, 2005; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002).

The notion that masculine identities can be achieved through alternative practices is developed by Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) in their study of working-class and middle-class boys in London schools. Stephen Frosh and his colleagues observe that while many of the young boys did identify with representations of masculinity which emphasise toughness and a propensity for action, this version was often recognised as being unattainable. This led many to produce softer, less polarised and transgressive masculine identities. Other research likewise notes that masculinity may be achieved in non-hegemonic terms. Edley (2001), for instance, observes that, although often associated with toughness, drinking beer or being good at DIY, masculinity can also be achieved via a *disavowal* of sporting interest or the *rejection* of stereotypical representations of hyper-masculinity (see also, Edley and Wetherell (1999)). Such research suggests that most boys and young men typically produce and negotiate non-hegemonic versions of masculinity, albeit in ways that still conform to some culturally acceptable norm of what it means to be male.

Yet, the association of masculinity with certain forms of risk practice displays a remarkable resiliency. Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) go on to indicate that boys often identify with a 'popular masculinity' which reiterates familiar themes of hardness, sporting prowess, cussing and antagonism to schoolwork, attributes which invoke strong working-class associations (Robb, 2007). Similarly, Jackson (2006) asserts a close correspondence between popular laddishness and a rejection of school work, messing around in class and a prioritising of social over academic pursuits, characteristics which carry more than an echo of Paul Willis' working-class lads who were 'learning to labour' (Willis, 1977).

Further, associations of risk with masculinity now extend well beyond the parameters of white, working-class males. Understandings of the hegemonic vary depending on the specific social and cultural positions from which young men experience their everyday world (Messerschmidt, 1993; 1994) as well as to complex intersections of gender with class, ethnicity and sexuality (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Brown, 2005). Messerschmidt (1994), for instance, demonstrates how white, middle-class boys may perform popular versions of masculinity in alternate ways, engaging in risky practices such as pranks, vandalism, petty thefts and alcohol consumption. Sheila Henderson and her colleagues (2007) go further, observing that the young middle-class men in their *Inventing Adulthoods* study readily bought into a working-class identity, expressing this symbolically via an engagement in alcohol consumption, smoking and drug-use as well as drug dealing and other 'scam' activities. Alternatively, working-class boys from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, who in Connell's terms are unable to attain hegemonic status, may seek approved masculinity through the development of a strong sense of collective loyalty to the local

community based around territorial ownership (Messerschmidt, 1993) and physical toughness: this represents less of an attempt to assert hegemonic masculinity and more of a response to the structural inequalities that they encounter (Alexander, 2002). These broader associations of masculinity with forms of risk are compounded by the fact that young men from a range of social locations are now regarded as members of a risk generation (France, 2007). Any link between risky practices and a hegemonic masculinity is, therefore, no longer the sole preserve of marginalised, working-class males.

Such research implies that the most sought after form of masculinity is never based on clearly differentiated configurations of practice characterised by a definable, distinctive essence (Demetriou, 2001; Petersen, 2003); rather the organised forms of intelligibility which comprise the hegemonic or approved form of masculinity in any particular context are always multiple, varied and deeply complex (Cornwall and Lindisfarne, 1994; Wetherell and Edley, 1999). Applying this to my investigation, these forms of intelligibility do not rest upon a universally accepted understanding of what constitutes risk, nor of how this relates to a preferred masculinity. Rather, this is open to contestation and negotiation according to different relations to the materiality of everyday life and to varying cultural understandings of risk and gender relating to position in social and neighbourhood space.

In this chapter I engage with these discussions of risk and masculinity using data from a number of focus groups with boys and young men. As with the females, risk narratives were informed by dominant governmental youth risk discourses; that is,

many of the issues discussed were those which routinely appear in media reports of youth risk and risky youth as I discussed in Chapter Three. These risk narratives were, however, refracted through a gendered lens. In discussing external threats with particular neighbourhood spaces and sites of youth leisure emphasis lay very much with the perceived risks of confrontation with other males. As for risk practices with the potential for causing personal harm, the stress was very much on, variously, sporting activities, riding bikes in a local park, playing or hanging around by traffic, petty shoplifting and trespass, alcohol consumption, drug-use and fights with other young men; that is, with risk practices traditionally associated with young men and masculinity. Also of interest, was the extent to which boys and young men frequently articulated a strong sense of competency in being able to manage or control such risks (Henderson et al., 2007); this was clearly bound up with their situated performances of masculinity.

However, importantly, experiences and understandings of risks and gender also reflected the different material, social and cultural contexts in which their everyday lives were lived (Bunton, Green and Mitchell, 2004; Crawshaw, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Bennett et al., 2009). Hence, while the tendency of many was to discuss risks in ways that positioned them simultaneously as the problematised subjects of governmental risk discourses *and* as boys or young men who correspond closely with a hegemonic or popular masculinity, risk narratives were patterned in different ways according to the age, ethnicity and class of the person. As I demonstrate, these material, cultural and discursive factors had particular implications for how risk practices were discussed and for the situated accomplishment of masculine identities (Wetherell, 2006) occurring in the focus group context.

'I don't get hangovers': Alcohol, Drugs and Masculinities

In discussing alcohol consumption and drug-use there were some similarities across the focus groups. However, it was more common to find variations according to the social position occupied by boys and young men. This had implications for how alcohol and drug-use were constructed as symbolic practices which distinguish normative and non-normative masculinities. As such, through their risk narratives, boys and young men occupying different social positions reproduced masculine identities in complex, fluid and ambivalent ways: sometimes identifying with dominant constructions of masculinity mobilised by governmental risk discourses; more frequently contesting or negotiating these by drawing on other culturally approved ways of being masculine.

Most of the boys and young men generally disidentified from dominant constructions of the binge drinking male which are mobilised by governmental youth risk discourses, narratives instead being typified by a general absence of references to excessive drinking. This may have been on account of my positionality; a degree of suspicion about my conducting research into activities routinely used to mark young people as a social problem. However, given the dynamic and enthusiastic discussions displayed by most of the boys and young men, including a number of somewhat melodramatic 'masculine' performances, I was left with the impression that such risk-taking was indeed largely absent in their leisure patterns. Narratives were nevertheless infused with understandings of alcohol consumption as a common, taken-for-granted, activity which was seen as a normal and responsible practice

associated with young men; drinking generally being represented as being for relaxation and enjoyment rather than for simply getting drunk.

For several boys and young men alcohol was either not discussed or was constructed as a risk practice engaged in by others rather than by themselves. Reflecting the intersections of age and class, the 14-15 year-old white, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) for example, made no reference to alcohol-related practices. Likewise, white, working-class boys (Focus Group 11) constructed alcohol consumption as a significant problem within their neighbourhood, but suggested that they did not personally engage in this practice.

The older white, middle-class men (Focus Group 2) did talk about alcohol consumption in ways that positioned them in relatively normative terms as young men who avoid excessive risk-taking. John, a self-confessed 'fitness freak' and a 'cage fighter', said that although he had consumed alcohol regularly as a young teenager he had now 'grown out of it'. Others claimed to be regular drinkers: Robbie stated that he drank a 'couple of pints a night' while Mike indicated that as well as drinking beer he was also 'a big whisky drinker'. Likewise, Carl, acknowledging that excessive drinking could be 'bad for your health', nevertheless said he drank quite a lot and that his nights out typically involved pre-loading with spirits or wine. Yet, no one discussed excessive alcohol consumption in terms productive of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter Four, these narrative were informed as much by understandings of risk according to age, their focus lying predominantly with relatively moderate and responsible drinking patterns associated with a more mature adulthood and an avoidance of venues where they felt there to be some likelihood of

alcohol-related conflict or nuisance behaviour. Informed by specific intersections of gender, class and age, these young men hence reproduced their masculine identities based around discourses of responsibility, disidentifying with forms of heavy drinking traditionally understood as a symbolic marker of hegemonic masculinity.

Others discussed alcohol consumption in different ways. Some of the white, middle-class 16-18 year-olds (Focus Group 5) for example, tended to discuss alcohol in ways that simultaneously positioned them as subjects of problematising governmental youth risk discourse *and* as young men commensurate with a hegemonic masculinity. Neil, Simon and, especially, Jon, talked extensively of various occasions involving excessive consumption. Some of these occasions were associated with 'having a laugh with friends', though they were also presented as having led to 'anti-social' practices such as sitting on cars, jumping through hedges, fighting with other young men or vomiting in public spaces.

This risk narrative was often characterised by boastful accounts of excessive consumption. Jon, for example, spoke of having recently consumed almost a full litre bottle of vodka and Simon recalled a recent party at which he had drunk 'ten bottles of Stella and Malibu', an achievement of which he claimed to be 'quite proud'. These young men did not consider themselves to be problematic drinkers; acts of excessive consumption were associated with monthly visits to the city centre while a few cans of beer drunk at home were constructed as being more typical. Nevertheless, risk narratives were characterised by repeated assertions of being able to control both their alcohol intake and its effects on their body. Discussing the limits of his drinking, Simon stated that 'you sort of know when to stop', adding that if he felt he had drunk

too much then he would make himself sick. This was echoed elsewhere in the narrative:

Focus Group 5:

- Neil: [...] I sort of, I feel, it sounds stupid, I feel like I've developed a sort of tolerance because I can drink quite a lot and like stop myself from being sick, and I feel that I'm gonna be sick and I stop myself from being sick and then carry on drinking and just like
- Dave: So it's like you reach a, y'know, you get drunk and then hit a plateau and it stabilises?
- Neil: Yeah, I feel like I need to be sick and, I stop myself from being sick and then I'm alright and then, you know
- Jon: I, I don't have a limit cos I don't get hangovers, ever!
- Simon: No I don't get them either
- Jon: I mean like I'll wake up and I'll feel, a bit iffy, get a shower, have something to eat and I'm sound.

In this exchange, Neil's utterance that 'I've developed a sort of tolerance', Jon's claim that 'I don't get hangovers, ever!' and Simon's unequivocal agreement with this, comprise specific linguistic repertoires and extreme case formulations which both constructed their alcohol consumption as non-problematic, and worked to position them in localised cultural discourses relating to hegemonic masculinity; each of the speakers reflexively positioning themselves as men capable of drinking heavily and controlling or resisting the effects of alcohol upon their bodies. However, much of this narrative was also bound up with the young men's situated performances of masculinity within the focus group context. Interactions were often quite excitable and it did appear that they were keen to impress both each other and myself through

reference to their alleged drinking exploits and their ability to control the effects of alcohol on their body. Nonetheless, whether or not their narratives reflected actual incidents in their everyday lives, these performances indicated that for these young men, alcohol consumption, especially an ability to drink excessively without getting too drunk, was understood as an important symbolic marker of a culturally approved masculinity.

Reflecting alternative relations with the materiality of everyday life and drawing upon very different cultural risk discourses and interpretative repertoires, young working-class men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 15) discussed alcohol consumption in quite different ways. With the exception of Fadil who did acknowledge drinking occasionally, all claimed emphatically that they did not consume alcohol. Importantly, alcohol consumption and related practices such as going to bars and clubs were constructed very much as *white* issues. Talking of binge drinking for example, Fadil asserted that 'not many black people get drunk on a regular basis' while Dwight noted that the majority of people who were stopped by police for binge drinking were white. As he put it: 'If you ask, how many people like do you see get stopped for binge drinking, getting arrested every night, probably say, eighty per-cent of it's white people'. Here then the young men positioned themselves as masculine in ways that simultaneously disavowed an association with problematised practices linked to hegemonic masculinity: at the same time, they engaged in boundary work, expressing and reproducing a distinction between themselves and white masculinity.

Differential accomplishments of masculinity were also evident in discussions of drug-

use. Most said that they did not use drugs, though they did lay claim to encountering such practices, either in their respective neighbourhoods or in places associated with the night-time economy. Many expressed antipathy towards drug-use, reproducing a masculinity informed by a strong sense of moral responsibility. Amongst the older men (Focus Group 2), for example, Mike and Robbie condemned drug-use while Peter asserted that drug-use was 'just stupid', supporting his claim with reference to a friend who had 'changed as a person' and 'lost his job' on account of his cocaine addiction. Echoing these sentiments, several white, middle-class 16-18 year-olds (Focus Group 5) constructed drug-use as pointless: as Jon put it; 'I mean, what's the point? I'm a, I'm a genuinely happy person so I don't see how taking stuff like that would make me feel any better'.

This moral positioning was also evident in the risk narrative produced by young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Group 15). However, their risk narrative was again racialised, drug-use also being constructed as a 'white' problem. These young men again reproduced a distinction between black and white drug-users; Hasan proclaimed that 'I don't really see black crackheads' and both he and Nwankwo suggested that white people often used drugs because it was 'cool' whereas black people became involved with drugs as a way of dealing with poverty. In this respect, many reproduced masculine identities informed by moral discourses shaping responsible attitudes to drug-use; drug-use here being constructed as a devalued form of symbolic capital through which distinctions were made between an acceptable and unacceptable masculinity. The form that this positioning took was, however, also related to different patterns of socialisation and a cultural logic of practice associated with ethnicity (as I discuss in Chapter Seven).

Despite the general tendency to disidentify with drug-use, some young men *did* acknowledge engagement in drug-related risk practices, producing masculine identities in slightly different, more ambivalent, ways. This was clearly evident in the narratives generated by the older men (Focus Group 2), Carl affirming that he used drugs regularly and Neil (Focus Group 5) that he smoked cannabis on a regular basis. In these cases drug-use was justified and masculinity reproduced via assertions of rationalised self-control. Carl further justified his drug-use partly on the basis that 'the risks are long-term', but also on account that he had 'never been in no trouble or never got in a fight' when using drugs. For his part, Neil justified his cannabis use by distinguishing himself from 'horrible junkies' who use hard drugs and constructed himself as somebody who was in control of both his drug habit and his body, claiming, with no sense of irony, that: 'I'm not addicted, I don't feel like I'm addicted, I haven't got an addictive personality and I've been smoking since I was like fourteen.' This emphasis on self-control was counter-posed to a tough masculinity, Neil asserting he did not smoke to 'look hard or anything', but simply because he enjoyed it.

Risk practices around alcohol and drug-use constituted symbolic activities through which young men produced and reproduced a range of masculine positions. Such practices were occasionally discussed in ways that simultaneously positioned them in hegemonic terms *and* as subjects of a problematising governmental risk discourse. Yet such a straightforward identification was rare. More typically, risk narratives illustrated the complex and fluid character of masculine identities, highlighting how these are produced and reproduced in multifarious ways according to differential relationships with the materiality of everyday life and varying localised cultural risk

discourses relating to specific intersections of gender with class, ethnicity and age.

'I hit him twice and he just give in': Risky Spaces, Fighting and Masculinities

As with risk narratives produced by young women, certain spaces and places were routinely cast variously as safe or as sites of potential conflict with others. However, not only did such understandings differ from those proffered by young women, there was also variation according to how gender interacted with other social positions.

Boys and young men generally used a range of linguistic repertoires which worked to construct local neighbourhood spaces as safe. For example, white, working-class boys (Focus Group 11) living in Speke, one of the most deprived areas in England with high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour and other social problems (see Chapter Three) asserted that they experienced few problems in their neighbourhood. Referring to local gangs, Adam said that 'they don't give us any trouble' and Jack, while describing the estate as 'not a particularly nice place to walk', went on to claim that it was 'not dangerous'. This was a claim echoed by white, middle-class, males (Focus Groups 8 and Group 9) and working-class males from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Focus Groups 7 and 16), all of whom regarded their respective neighbourhoods as relatively safe. Further, across these narratives there was little or no discussion of personal involvement in fights or acts of violence: working-class boys (Focus Group 11) did not refer to any such incidents and, similarly, middle-class boys noted having witnessed fights or of hearing stories involving conflicts between other boys, but only rarely referred to any direct involvement.

Where such conflicts were discussed they were invariably constructed as having been instigated by others, the young men routinely positioning themselves as innocent victims of more aggressive males. As I observed in Chapter Four, young people almost invariably associated such risks with *other* youths, most seemingly at pains to present themselves to me as moderator and others in their group in favourable terms. Reflecting different neighbourhood contexts and the intersection of gender and class, white, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) discussed the 'jumps', an area within a local park which, as I discussed in Chapter Four, was developed for use by BMX bikers. These boys referred to sometimes avoiding this area on account of the presence of 'scallies', male working-class youths whom they represented as routinely trying to start fights with other groups of boys and young men. Other spaces constructed as risky included bus-stops or routes to and from school which they associated with the possibility of being attacked by gangs of boys from other schools. Again, the emphasis was on the possibility of conflict being instigated by others, never by themselves. Likewise, white, working-class boys (Focus Group 11) identified certain parts of the Speke estate which they avoided of an evening on account of potential threats posed by gangs or the presence of young men drinking alcohol. Amongst the young white, middle-class men (Focus Group 5), both Jon and Simon indicated that certain parts of their neighbourhood were routinely occupied by 'big gangs of people' who come from 'bad areas'. This had resulted in them staying away from these areas or in seeking to avoid conflict by evading these groups. Similarly, these young men identified certain venues associated with the night-time leisure economy as risky. Simon and Jon contrasted a number of 'safe' venues which they went to when socialising in the city centre with more risky nightclubs which they saw as being frequented by 'not nice people' who 'just start stuff with you for no reason'.

Pete and Carl (Focus Group 2) spoke of avoiding the Concert Square area of the city centre as 'there is always a lot of fighting there'. Young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds living in Princes Park also identified certain areas as risky, but, as I discuss in Chapter Seven, did so almost exclusively in racialised terms. In this, a clear distinction was drawn between safe spaces in their local neighbourhood and risky spaces in neighbouring areas which they claimed to avoid due to the possibility of racial harassment or abuse.

These understandings of certain spaces and places as safe or risky informed risk narratives in ways that had implications for situated productions of gendered identities. At one level, in downplaying the extent of risk young men, particularly those living in more deprived parts of Liverpool, tended to reproduce masculinities based around a sense of fearlessness. Yet, masculinities were also typically constructed in non-hegemonic terms, most young men positioning themselves as rational risk avoiders. This often entailed the reproduction of gender and (as I discuss in Chapter Eight) class distinctions; young men reflexively positioning themselves as different from those risky, aggressive men referred to variously as having 'a hard boy attitude', as hanging around in 'gangs', as being 'scallies' and so forth.

Nonetheless, several did discuss occasions of active engagement in fighting, seeking to reproduce masculine identities in more conventional hegemonic terms. Jon (Focus Group 5) for instance, recounted several incidents where he had encountered conflicts with young men in his neighbourhood. Speaking of one incident, Jon claimed that a gang of young men had tried to pick a fight with him and a friend while he was in a local chip shop, constructing the incident thus:

Focus Group 5:

Jon: Yeah, so they come out and he started running his mouth, so I just ignored him but there was loads of them and just like two of us and then erm, I just told him to fuck-off, so he went back in the thing and then come back out later with erm, the chippy, and I just stood there and ignored him and then he er grabbed me from behind, but his mates pulled him off and erm someone told his mate that I was 'dead hard' ...

Here, despite his middle-class status, Jon sought to position himself very much in terms of a tough masculinity more traditionally associated with working-class males. Through speaking of how he had not let the gang intimidate him and how he had verbally challenged their threats, and by asserting he had not actually had to fight on account of his reputation as a man who was 'dead hard', Jon reproduced a tough masculinity; positioning himself as a young man who, while not actively seeking confrontation, was nevertheless able to look after himself should the occasion demand it.

In a similar vein, Alex (Focus Group 8), who, as I discuss in Chapter Eight, was often referred to by others in this group in class terms as a 'scallie', sought hegemonic status through talking about his association with fighting. In particular, Alex spoke of a forthcoming fight involving boys from another school and of an occasion when he had been amongst a crowd of football fans who had been taunting and throwing missiles at supporters for another team. Alex did not actually refer to being directly involved in these incidents, but his gendered performance nevertheless conveyed a strong sense of amusement and excitement, suggesting this was something that he identified with as a young man. In discussing fighting in such terms, both Jon and Alex positioned

themselves as the subjects of a problematising governmental risk discourse, albeit one which is simultaneously bound up with specific cultural understandings of what it means to be 'masculine'.

Several young working-class men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds also spoke at length about experiences of conflict with other young men. These accounts revolved around incidents of racially-motivated abuse or violence which they had endured in areas outside their immediate neighbourhood. Typical of this was Dwight's account of an incident involving him and his mother being racially abused while passing through a predominantly white, working-class part of the city:

Focus Group 15:

Dwight: Even in Liverpool, like we drove passed Walton and me mum asked for directions off this fella and he starts going 'what?' And then he goes to his mate 'the monkeys want directions!' and starts going 'ooo ooo ooo' [monkey sounds] and I went to my mum 'let's get out this car right now'. I was shocked! I was shocked! [...] I was like 'let's get, let's batter them' cos there was like three of them yeah, and I went 'let's batter them now' I was 'I'm sure we've got something in the boot'.

Discussing this incident, Dwight, a very tall and physically-imposing young man, did not refer to having actually used violence. Nevertheless in talking about his response to racist provocation in these terms, he positioned himself as a tough black, working-class, man who was capable of looking after himself. Similarly, speaking of a conflict with a group of young white men from his school, Fadil described how having been threatened he had 'just hit him with two punches', resulting in the white man

conceding defeat. Again, in this conversational moment, Fadil sought to reflexively position himself as a tough man capable of defending himself, seemingly with minimal effort, should he be threatened. This group's narrative was replete with similar examples of engagement in fights as a response to racial abuse. Through these the young men not only legitimised violence as a defensive reaction to unprovoked racial abuse, they simultaneously positioned themselves as tough black men who were able to take care of themselves should the need arise. I develop this theme further in the next chapter where I critically discuss the relationships between risk and ethnicity.

Through their risk narratives young men generally constructed local neighbourhood spaces and places as safe and non-threatening, though across all groups there were specific areas understood as posing some risk of violent confrontation with other young men. In this respect masculinities were reproduced in terms of a confident self-reliance, the young men positioning themselves as individuals comfortable in their own neighbourhood space and as able to avoid or manage conflict with other males. Where the potential for conflict with other young men did arise, some discussed this in terms productive of a hegemonic or tough black masculinity: several reflexively positioning themselves as young men capable of looking after themselves physically. Again, however, these narratives and the positioning of masculine subjectivities therein may have had as much to do with the perceived need to perform masculinity in a culturally approved way. Most of these groups were constructed around pre-existing peer groups. This can be an advantage inasmuch as it enables participants to draw upon shared experiences from everyday life and to discuss these according to common meaning frames. At the same time, however, these very group processes

can inhibit discussion, especially where there is a fear of peer disapproval or an unwillingness to deviate from group norms (Kitzinger, 1994; Smithson, 2000; Stokes and Bergin, 2006). Certainly it is possible that the emphasis on local neighbourhoods being safe was due in large part to participants feeling unable to express a sense of vulnerability in a context where this could have been seen to undermine attempts to appear masculine in a culturally approved manner. Conversely, for those who did discuss engagement in fights with other men, these accounts were again bound up with particular performances of masculinity. Both Jon (Focus Group 5) and Dwight and Fadil (Focus Group 15) spoke extensively of their capacity for fighting other young men and again it appeared that these accounts were often designed to impress both other participants and myself as moderator. Nonetheless, as with discussions of alcohol, this was in and of itself indicative of the extent to which young men understood certain forms of risk-taking as being intrinsically bound up with performances of a credible masculinity.

For the majority of the young men violent confrontation was constructed as something to be avoided where possible. Indeed, as I discuss in the following section, any straightforward identification with a hegemonic masculinity was rare and masculinities were more commonly reproduced and renegotiated in multifarious ways according to differential social locations, different experiences of risk and specific interactions within the focus group conversation itself.

‘Why would you want to get drunk?’: Negotiating Masculinities

For several young men hegemonic masculinity was sought via an assertion of their being able to drink excessively and/or to be able to look after themselves physically. For the most part, however, culturally approved forms of masculinity were accomplished by discussing such risks in alternate, though nonetheless, legitimate, ways.

For instance, Jonathon (Focus Group 9), a very loud, gregarious and boastful individual who tended to dominate discussion, spoke at length about his capacity for looking after himself. In one such narrative he described himself as having used his physique to stop a fight between two ‘big men’ in the school by simply pulling them apart with his fingers. At other points in his narrative, however, Jonathon laid claim to an approved masculinity through eschewing engagement in alcohol consumption in favour of sporting prowess: as he put it: ‘if I wasn’t playing football I would drink like every weekend, but I don’t now cos I play football ...’ Similarly, while unable to accomplish hegemonic masculinity on account of their minority ethnic status (Connell, 1987), Dwight, Fadil and Nwankwo (Focus Group 16) reproduced masculine identities based around a physical toughness while simultaneously laying much stress on their *avoidance* of alcohol. In these instances then, men sought to position themselves in terms of a tough masculinity premised on notions of self-discipline and control while renouncing active engagement with a risk practice frequently viewed as symbolising an approved masculinity.

Some reproduced their masculinities through citing other risk practices. White, working-class boys (Focus Group 11) referred to neither engagement in alcohol consumption nor violence; rather, their main focus was on activities such as playing football, messing around, hanging around on local fields, play-fighting and playing computer games. The boys did not reproduce masculinity in hegemonic terms, but nevertheless retained an emphasis on physical or sporting activity. Similarly, whereas amongst white, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8), Alex sought hegemonic status through an emphasis on fighting, others in the group referred to alternative risk practices. For instance, speaking of the numerous occasions on which he had stolen goods from local shops, including one incident in which he had allegedly taken twelve cans of drink for his friends, Daniel bragged about his capacity for shoplifting. In claiming to be 'good at robbing things' Daniel positioned himself not as a tough man capable of looking after himself physically, but as a daring, risk-taker who saw shoplifting as a way of securing prestige amongst his peers.

While at times boys and young men reproduced hegemonic or culturally approved masculinities by laying claim to engaging in certain risky practices, elsewhere these were accomplished in different, even contradictory, ways. White, middle-class 16-18 year-olds for example, said much of their ability to drink heavily; and yet at other points in their risk narrative excessive drinking was condemned. Talking of media representations of binge drinking, Neil, who had earlier claimed to have developed a tolerance towards the effects of alcohol, asserted that:

Focus Group 5:

Neil: Why would you want to do that? Because you know you're not having a good time anymore are you, you just make

yourself ill, you're gonna suffer the next day, you've passed out, lying in the gutter, you're not having a good time, you can go out and have a drink but ...

Neil's comments, which were echoed by the rest of the group, constructed a symbolic limit to alcohol consumption and by extension, to his masculinity; this was redefined by an ability to drink heavily, but within culturally acceptable limits. Hence, the young men repositioned themselves as relatively responsible drinkers, drawing a distinction from those unable to control their consumption.

Along the same lines, while Jon spoke extensively about his fighting prowess, at other points he offered more nuanced accounts. Referring to avoiding certain areas and staying away from trouble in night-clubs, Jon again effectively renegotiated his masculinity, repositioning himself as a more rational, risk avoider. Likewise, Neil narrated two incidents where he had been threatened or physically assaulted by others: the first involved him being threatened by 'this gang like of ten-year olds', the second an altercation with a group of young girls, one of whom had attempted to set him alight using an aerosol and a cigarette lighter. On both accounts Neil asserted he had actively *avoided* confrontation by walking away, saying of the first incident he was not going to 'waste my time' and of the second that 'I wasn't going to hit her back, y'know I wouldn't do that'. Here Neil reproduced a masculinity informed not by tough physicality, but by an ability to restrain himself in the face of open provocation and a moral discourse through which violence against younger boys or girls is understood as transgressive of a culturally approved masculinity.

Similar renegotiations of masculine identity were evident elsewhere. Jonathon (Focus

Group 9) spoke of an occasion when he had felt threatened when walking past a group of other young men, adding that had his friend, whom he described as a 'big lad', not been with him then 'I would probably have come in with two broken cheek bones and a fractured skull'. In this conversational moment Jonathon re-negotiated his masculinity, re-casting this in less hegemonic terms via an acknowledgment that he had, on this occasion at least, felt unable to look after himself and had been reliant on a tougher friend for protection.

The tough masculinity produced by young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds was likewise often renegotiated. While constructing violence as a legitimate response to unprovoked racial assault or abuse, discussions of specific incidents often entailed some acknowledgement they had not actually resorted to violence. For example, in discussing two separate incidents of being racially abused by older men, both Fadil and Nwankwo indicated that although they had felt extremely angry they had not retaliated on account of their respective assailants' age. Similarly, speaking of the incident where he and his mother had been referred to as 'monkeys' Dwight noted he had refrained from retaliating on account of a plea from his mother not to get involved. In these instances the production of a tough masculinity was re-negotiated through the invocation of moral discourses around respect for elders and parental authority. This was also invoked in discussing alcohol consumption, Dwight noting that he did not drink as 'y'mum will be disappointed wont she' while Fadil, though acknowledging having been drunk on occasion, said he would never do this in front of his parents as 'I know that they'll beat the livin' hell out of me'.

These narratives were particularly indicative of how the focus group method allows

participants to draw on actual, material, events from their everyday lives and to express these according to their culturally related discourses which are informed by social position. Further, they also illustrate how, in the processes of conversational interactions, the positioning of selves and others in particular subject positions routinely shift. This was especially evident where different understandings of what constitutes acceptable risk practices were brought to the fore. For instance, most of the white, middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) distanced themselves from Daniel's claims around shoplifting. Implying a moral condemnation of his actions, Simon asserted that he had 'never stolen', while Peter claimed that; 'I don't think most of us can comment on shoplifting'. Here, both Simon and Peter interactively positioned Daniel as something of a deviant risk-taker who lacked the same moral values as they held. As such, these young men accomplished their masculinities in quite different ways. Likewise, building on Alex's account of football related violence, John and Thomas said this was something they had observed as innocent bystanders rather than having actively engaged in. Football violence was hence constructed as a risk practice associated with *other* young men, John and Thomas reproducing their masculinities in less aggressive terms and drawing a distinction between themselves and the tough masculinity sought by Alex.

Elsewhere, highlighting the potential of the focus group method to bring dissonances and disagreement to the fore, masculinities were contested or renegotiated through open confrontation. For instance, in discussing his drug-use, Carl (Focus Group 2) sought to justify this on the basis that he was able to control his habit and that he never got aggressive. In this Carl sought to position himself, not in hegemonic terms as tough, but as a non-aggressive, rational risk-taker. This positioning was, however,

contested by Mike in the following terms:

Focus Group 2:

Mike: ... that's the thing though, people who take it don't really know what they're like at the time cos they don't look at themselves and go 'oh 'ere you go, eh! what a dickhead you are,' they just, they don't know what they're acting like, you've never seen yourself like that, that's the point [...] you never see yourself like that, how other people see you...

Reflecting his distinctive pattern of socialisation, Mike's response was informed by a moral discourse through which drug-use was understood as transgressive of acceptable masculinity. In challenging Carl's position Mike engaged in boundary work, his constant use of the 'they' working to distinguish himself from drug-users and reproducing his own masculinity in moral, risk-averse terms. In this moment, masculinity was premised, not on an ability to 'control' one's drug-use, but its avoidance. Discussing drug-use in these terms Mike simultaneously distinguished himself from Carl whom he inter-subjectively positioned as someone lacking morality and self respect.

A further example of young men re-negotiating masculinities through open confrontation occurred in a heated exchange between two of the white, middle-class 16-18 year-olds (Focus Group 9). Here Liam boasted of having recently drunk a full bottle of vodka, positioning himself in hegemonic terms as a tough man able to handle his drink. This account was overtly challenged by Mark, a dissonant case who occupied a higher social class position and lived in a much more affluent part of Liverpool. This was reflected in his own risk narrative which was also informed by

different material experiences and cultural understandings of masculinity:

Focus Group 9:

- Dave: And, and what were your binge drinking exploits?
Liam: Erm, a bottle of Vodka
Mark: As if you did!
Liam: I did!
Mark: A whole bottle? How big was the bottle? How big was the bottle?
Sam: You weren't there!
Liam: It was only a little one.

Mark's challenge undermined Liam's claim to a hegemonic masculinity, forcing him to readjust his masculine positioning. This took the form of variously, the reassertion of the original claim, the downgrading of the vodka to a 'small one' and the citation of anecdotal evidence of having witnessed other men consuming a full bottle. Finally, Liam launched a counter-attack of his own, drawing attention to Mark's small physique. In this Liam reasserted his own positioning as hegemonic and positioned Mark as subordinate, constructing him as a small and weak young man who lacked the authority to speak on issues such as alcohol consumption.

In discussing risk young men often displayed a desire to appear as masculine within the group context. However, the form that masculinities took and the ways in which risk practices were understood as symbolic markers of this often varied, shifting both according to the social location of each group and to inter-subjective dynamic interactions through which gendered identities were reproduced and renegotiated. Further, examples of instances of negotiation, confrontation, criticism and the delegitimisation of responses, all of which are part and parcel of conversational

processes (Silva and Wright, 2005), enabled different culturally relevant risk discourses and material practices to be made visible. This, in turn, highlighted how particular masculine identities were variously accepted, contested or negotiated in the very processes of discussing everyday risks.

Conclusion

Throughout this study risk narratives were informed by the very discourses through which boys and young men come to know and understand themselves as a problematised risk population (Robb, 2007). That is to say, the risk practices discussed largely accorded with those which predominate in media representations of risky male youth. These narratives were clearly patterned according to gender and, while drawing upon similar interpretative repertoires as the women, risk practices were rarely discussed in the same terms. For instance, in discussing the risks of violent assault or confrontation with other youths, boys and young men typically referred to being able to look after themselves physically. Similarly, talk of drug-use or, more frequently, alcohol consumption, was accompanied by an emphasis on their competency in being able to manage and control such risks (Henderson et al., 2007): individual management or avoidance of excessive risks here taking the place of the complex strategies of reciprocal support offered by the friendship group identified by young women (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Hey, 2001). In this respect, understandings of risk worked to mark points of distinction from women and femininity.

Although risk narratives were patterned according to gender, there were nonetheless, some important variations relating to other social positions. As Martin Robb (2007:121) observes, young masculinity is not a singular entity that can be 'understood in isolation from other aspects of young men's social identities'. This is echoed in my research which shows that experiences and understandings of risk varied according to the different material, cultural and social resources available relating to age, ethnicity and class and neighbourhood location. For instance, as I discuss extensively in Chapter Eight, narratives exhibited considerable variation according to social class and neighbourhood, although there were some overlaps between working- and middle-class males, particularly around attitudes towards fighting and drinking. Indeed, some white middle-class men tended to perform their masculinity in a manner more evocative of a traditional working-class masculinity, illustrating here the complex manner in which gender and class may intersect (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Henderson et al., 2007). Variations were more apparent in terms of age (see Chapter Four). Generally, boys said little about practices relating to alcohol and drugs, focusing more extensively on practices such as hanging around on streets or in parks, conflicts with boys from other schools, or shoplifting. By contrast, their older counterparts spoke far more extensively about experiences of drink and drugs and of the potential for alcohol-related conflict. In this respect, experiences and understandings of risk were gendered, but they were also nuanced by age. Finally, boys and young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds tended to racialise risk, focusing almost exclusively on encounters with racial abuse or violence. Again, however, understandings of, and responses to, these risks were understood in terms of a culturally acceptable masculinity: an ability to physically look after oneself again figuring prominently in these narratives. In these respects, my data broadly support

Messerschmidt's (1993:87) observation that 'boys will be boys differently, depending upon their position in social structures'.

Risk narratives were also found to be internally complex in ways that had implications for the situated accomplishments of masculinities. In each group at least some of the boys and young men reproduced understandings of risk practices as symbolic markers of a hegemonic or popular masculinity. At the same time, it was common to see certain risks being used to mark points of distinction between acceptable and non-acceptable masculine positions. Yet, such a straightforward correspondence between risk practice and masculinity was rare. The very meanings of risk practices often shifted as young men 'jockeyed for position' (Edley and Wetherell, 1996) and whereas in one conversational moment certain practices were productive of a hegemonic or popular masculinity, in others they could be recast as transgressive. Indeed, it was more common for boys and young men to speak of risk practices in *non-hegemonic* ways, reproducing alternative, though nonetheless culturally approved ways of being masculine (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002). Hence, producing and reproducing masculinities in relatively *normative* terms, boys and young men often downplayed their engagement in drug-use, said little of excessive alcohol consumption and constructed violence as a risk to be avoided where possible. In this respect, boys and young men produced, contested and renegotiated masculinities in a range of ways, sometimes complying with dominant governmental youth risk discourses, at others identifying more closely with their respective culturally acceptable masculine forms.

What all of this indicates is that there is no universally accepted understanding of how risky practices constitute a hegemonic or popular masculinity. Rather, as suggested by other researchers examining young masculinities, understanding the relationship between youth, risk and identity also necessitates paying close attention to how risks are bound up with understandings of gender and its particular relations to age, class and local neighbourhood and, as I discuss next, ethnicity.

Introduction: Risk and Ethnicity

So far I have shown how experiences and understandings of risk were found to be related in important ways to age and gender. In this chapter I turn attention to questions of ethnicity. Ethnicity is a social position characterised by some common life experiences, shared histories and similar social practices such as, for example, in respect of art, dance and music. Such practices are simultaneously intertwined with the marking of belonging and the reproduction of ethnic distinctions (Bentley, 1987; DiMaggio, 1992; Hall, J. R. 1992; Trienekens, 2002; Webster, 2009). However, to date, scant attention has been paid to the relationship between understandings of risk and ethnicity in general (Mythen, 2004), or to young people in particular. Likewise, relatively little has been said of the role that risk practices play in ethnically related identity work.

As with much academic research, interest in the relationships between ethnicity and youth cultural practices has its origins in the subcultural approaches associated with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the 1970s. Initial studies were relatively silent on matters of 'race' and ethnicity (Alexander, 2000; Bose, 2003). Where ethnicity was discussed attention was focused on the political meanings of *white* youth subcultural styles. Skinheads, for example, were cast as a politicised response to post-war immigration and the decline of traditional white working-class communities (Cohen, P., 1972; Clarke, 1975/1993) while Mods were viewed as

appropriating cultural practices shaped by the religion, language, rhythms and style of the West Indies so as to construct themselves as 'cool' (Hebdige, 1975/1993).

Greater emphasis on 'race' and ethnicity was later attributed by writers wishing to demonstrate that black subcultural forms such as reggae, ska (Gilroy, 1987; Gilroy and Lawrence, 1988) and Rastafarianism (Garrison, 1979) articulated historically and culturally informed forms of resistance to racial oppression and social and economic exclusion. Where black and white subcultures came together the result was often found to be a hybridisation and syncretisation of cultural practices: black music, dance and language providing white working-class youth with the raw material for their own distinctive forms of cultural expression and symbolic resistance to dominant middle-class values (Jones, S. 1988).

These early accounts focused mainly on the structural context of youth subcultures, attesting to the day-to-day realities of both working-class and racial exclusion and marginalisation, and noting how certain youth cultural practices were informed by history and culture at the intersections of 'race' and class. Yet, while certain risky practices did feature in these accounts, especially violence and drug-use, as with much of the early work produced by the CCCS, the main emphasis lay with uncovering the symbolic meanings of style as I discussed in Chapter One.

Consequently, questions of how risk practices were understood and experienced, as well as their role in expressing and reproducing ethnic distinctions, largely went unasked.

More recent research which falls loosely under the umbrella term of post-subcultural studies asserts that contemporary youth cultures are no longer shaped by specific

histories and cultures. Informed in part by those who suggest that in conditions of late modernity traditional social structures no longer exercise such a powerful hold over cultural practices and lifestyles (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), emphasis is instead given to the role played by media and consumer culture. In this context, so it is argued, youth culture is characterised by an endless mixing of styles, fashions and musical tastes in which traditional class, gender and ethnic divisions are being dissolved (Redhead, 1993; Thornton, 1995; Bennett, A., 2000). For instance, rap and hip-hop, once the bastions of black youth subcultural resistance, are now seen as having been appropriated by white youth from a range of class and geographical locations who use this to articulate a variety of focal concerns (Bennett, A., 2000).

Yet, as with many aspects of post-subculturalism, such accounts typically over-emphasise this blurring of boundaries, paying little attention to how ethnic differences and distinctions continue to be produced and maintained. As Alexander (2000) points out, in the rush to celebrate diversity and hybridisation, the extent to which power structures and the materiality of everyday life continue to inform black and Asian youth cultures is often overlooked. Indeed, other accounts more helpfully assert the continued political significance of 'race' and ethnicity in respect of dance and music, drawing attention to how certain practices constitute the marking of ethnically based distinctions from other black cultures and dominant white mainstream culture (Bakare-Yusuf, 1997; Carrington and Wilson, 2004). As with earlier subcultural accounts, however, these studies also focus primarily on music and fashion, little meaningful consideration given to the relation of risk practices to ethnic identity.

Where attention has been directed towards the relationship between ethnicity and risk practices the saliency of material, cultural and social resources relating to the local contexts in which young people live has been found to remain strong. This is clearly evident in terms of the social distribution of material risks associated with youth-to-adult transitions and youth culture more generally. Risks associated with youth-to-adult transition, for instance, are strongly influenced by ethnicity, especially where this interacts with class location. As Colin Webster (2009) observes, changes in schooling, youth training and employment, drug markets, and local neighbourhoods over the course of the past few decades have all had a profoundly deleterious impact upon the lifestyles and opportunities for young working-class people from black or ethnic minority backgrounds. The likelihood of being either perpetrator or victim of violent crime, the chances of being stopped and searched by police, and the extent of engagement in drug or alcohol misuse are also related to one's ethnic identity (Muncie, 2009; Bennett and Holloway, 2005). Further, young people from certain black or minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be problematised in youth risk discourses, Afro-Caribbean or Asian men often being associated with crime, gang-related violence and even terrorism by media and moral guardians (Hall, S. et al., 1978; Webster, 1997, 2009; Alexander, 2000; Malik, 2002; Bose, 2003). Such associations often lead to young black and Asian men being excluded from youth cultural venues associated with the night-time leisure industry such as pubs and clubs, adding further to their social marginalisation and exclusion (Bose, 2003). These dimensions of risk are integral to the social and cultural contexts in which young people live out their everyday lives and through which their values, meanings and identities are shaped (Henderson et al., 2007). Understanding more fully how risks are related to ethnic identity therefore necessitates acknowledging that

distinctive forms of practice may also be generated by ethnic location (Bennett et al., 2009) as well as by other indicators of social position.

Post-subcultural claims of the dismantling of youth cultural boundaries have been further undermined by cultural geographers concerned with exploring the relationships between risk, 'race' and ethnicity as it relates to young people in their neighbourhoods. Risk practices such as drug or alcohol use, violence, sexual assault or racism are associated by young people with particular geographical spaces or places. Meanings and understandings of these local spaces as risky are, in turn, deeply intertwined with ethnic identities, constituting an important part of who people are (Thrift, 1997; Watt and Stenson, 1998; Scraton and Watson, 1998; Holloway, 2000; Delaney, 2002; Dwyer and Jones 2002; Seabrook and Green, 2004; Green and Singleton, 2006). This is especially salient where neighbourhood space is related to shared experiences of racism. Young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds often experience urban spaces as highly racialised, constraining and exclusionary, producing a racialised geography through which certain neighbourhood spaces or other sites of youth cultural practices come to be defined as safe or dangerous, as white or minority ethnic (Watt and Stenson, 1998; Dwyer and Jones, 2000; Pain, 2001; Ehrkamp, 2008). These understandings of *our sort* of place are, in turn, mobilised to distinguish the kinds of people *we are not* (Reay and Lucey, 2000). In this sense, shared experiences of racism are closely bound up with particular understandings of self and others.

What is suggested in all of this is that the relationship between risk and ethnicity remains strong. In this chapter I add to this research by discussing data produced by

young people living in Liverpool who occupy different ethnic locations. While I focus primarily on the risk narratives generated by young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds (Appendix 1), I also discuss some key themes to emerge from the narratives produced by white youths. This approach is informed largely by the form and content of the respective risk narratives, the former being most illustrative of how ethnicity informs experiences and understandings of risk. Participants from black or minority ethnic backgrounds were found to draw extensively upon an interpretative repertoire which understands risk as an external threat. However, I show that these risks were defined almost exclusively in terms of racial harassment or assault: white youth, by contrast, rarely discussed risk in such racialised terms. Where narratives went beyond issues of racism to consider risk practices which hold some potential for personal harm, I demonstrate that a strong ethnic patterning remained in evidence, albeit with some variations according to specific interactions of ethnicity with age and, especially, gender. Again, as I show, this was more clearly apparent in the risk narratives of black or minority ethnic youth. These very different understandings of risk were bound up with particular understandings of belonging and exclusion. Indeed, as I further illustrate, certain risk practices were also mobilised as forms of symbolic capital through which certain ethnic distinctions were expressed and maintained.

'I will walk down there and everyone will be looking at me': Risk, Racism and Place

Young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds were drawn from Princes Park. As noted previously, this incorporates Toxteth, a socially and economically deprived area which also has a long history of racial tension. This context clearly informed the discourses and interpretative repertoires cited by those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Discussions focused variously on confrontations with white youth, racist abuse from older people and harassment from teachers or police. This issue was discussed by all, regardless of age or gender location. As narratives unfolded it became apparent that such risks were associated with particular places and spaces in Liverpool. In this regard, these young people constructed racialised geographies, delineating 'safe' black from 'risky' white areas. However, the form that narratives took, and the implications of this for identity work, was also found to be influenced in part by gender and age.

Such understandings of risk were prominent amongst the women (Focus Group 16). Sharnaz and Anila discussed a shared experience of being racially abused when visiting a local fairground, Anila and Amita spoke of having been racially abused whilst travelling on a bus, Serena discussed an occasion when a passer-by had verbally abused her while she was waiting at a bus-stop and Asal referred to a recent event in which she had overheard a shopkeeper making racist remarks towards her. Several young men likewise spoke of experiences of racially motivated confrontations with white youths. Dwight's (Focus Group 15) encounter with a group of white men while driving through Walton which I discussed in the previous chapter clearly

resonated with others in the group. Hasan and Nwankwo referred to specific incidents in which they had been racially abused by strangers while Hasan, Dwight and Nwankwo co-produced a detailed narrative of being stopped by police and accused variously of possession of drugs or of involvement in a burglary. Other men (Focus Group 7) also associated risk with experiences of racial abuse. For these men, who all played together as members of a football team based in Toxteth, racism was understood as commonplace when playing matches in white areas of Liverpool. Hence, for example, Dean and Jermaine spoke of a recent game in Bootle, a predominantly white, working-class area in North Liverpool, in which they had been subjected to 'well racist comments'.

Younger participants drew on a similar interpretative repertoire. Amongst the girls, Amaani, Marwa and Laila (Focus Group 14) referred to the frequent occurrence of fights between black and white youths in their immediate neighbourhood, while boys (Focus Group 13) discussed several incidents in which they had been involved in skirmishes with white boys. Nazmi, for example, spoke of having recently been involved in 'a big fight' with a group of white boys while he was in the city centre and Anthony said that he had recently been the victim of an unprovoked attack by a group of white youths when on his way to school. This had apparently involved him being struck with a chain which, according to his friend, Kris, had left Anthony with physical scars on his arm and back.

Experiences of racism were associated with specific spaces and areas of Liverpool. Sharing experiences and building on each other's accounts, Serena (Focus Group 16) spoke of feeling 'uncomfortable' and 'out of place' when attending her sister's

graduation ceremony as there had been 'more white faces' than black; Ruksana discussed certain shopping centres in which she similarly felt out of place on account of her ethnicity; and Sharnaz who was Muslim, referred to racism having become worse in the wake of 9/11, illustrating this with reference to an incident at the city's airport when she had been racially insulted by a white passenger. Such comments resonated across the group, the women expressing a profound sense of feeling out of place in many parts of Liverpool because of their visible difference. This was expressed most emphatically by Raima who said she did not like leaving Toxteth as she felt 'intimidated in more white areas'.

Several young men likewise pointed to predominantly white areas which they either avoided or felt uncomfortable in. Here, illustrating how the focus group can bring shared experiences and understandings to the fore, Fadil and Hasan discuss how they often felt threatened, especially when alone, in areas outside of Toxteth:

Focus Group 15:

Fadil: I know I will walk down there on me own and everyone will be looking at me and I will be 'oh no', and then I would probably walk round some street corner and there's a group of lads and then I know that it's game over for me like

[...]

Hasan: It's weird when you walk into other areas, there's no black communities there, like no ethnic people. On the bus like when you enter that area, if you get a bus everyone's looking at you like erm 'well – you're different'

This sense of social exclusion or isolation in certain areas resounded throughout the risk narratives produced by young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds.

One area in particular, Garston, featured prominently in focused discussions. Garston lies some 4 miles south of Princes Park although the two areas are closely linked by a major bus route into the city centre. The area, characterised by high density white, working-class population (City of Liverpool, 2009) has in recent years become synonymous with a gang named the Mudmen, renowned for engaging in racially motivated attacks against black or minority ethnic youth. This gang was referred to on several occasions by most of these young people. Anwaar (Focus Group 13), a boy of 15, asserting that 'I didn't know that Garston was racist', spoke of the last occasion he had been in the area when he and his friends had been chased by members of the gang, one of whom was brandishing a knife. Likewise, Amaani, Marwa and Ruby (Focus Group 14) discussed the gang, claiming that 'they attack loads of people, black people that go to live in Garston and that'. The men (Focus Group 7) also discussed encounters with the Mudmen: Leroy, for example, spoke of having recently been at a party when 'about fifteen all come and started throwing bricks and everything [and] shouting all like racist stuff and everything'.

The association of risk with racism was used to distinguish risky 'white' areas from safer, more familiar areas, more heavily populated by people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, at times this was quite explicit: Jermaine (Focus Group 7) noted that he avoided Garston on account of its reputation and Dwight (Focus Group 15) asserted that 'there's like a border isn't there, between Toxteth and Smithdown (a major road running along the south-east boarder of Princes Park, beyond which lie Wavertree and Allerton, neighbourhoods with much greater white populations) and, and that's it, as soon as you go passed there, it's like no-go'. In this respect, understandings of risky spaces worked to enact a 'symbolic violence'

(Bourdieu, 1997/2000), these young people recognising that they are excluded from many parts of Liverpool.

Understandings of risk were strongly patterned according to ethnicity; yet, there were nonetheless marked differences according to specific interactions of ethnicity with gender and age. For example, the young men's discussion of risk focused more extensively on their direct encounters with racial abuse or harassment while, as I discussed in Chapter Six, risk narratives often contained references to the use or threat of violence and acts of bravado as legitimate responses to racism. Dwight and Hasan referred to several occasions of having been stopped by police in which they claimed to have responded with overt challenges to police authority. A good illustration of this can be found in the following extract:

Focus Group 15:

Hasan: Like once y'know we was in some car we just go up – y'know out-and-about, but then we get stopped [by the police]. They start searching us for drugs an' they say 'have you got drugs?' and then the police officer takes out some weed from his pocket and says 'it that yours?' He did that, really!

Dave: How did you feel when he did that?

Hasan: I laughed at him, an' then he put it back in his pocket

Several: [laugh]

Dave: It could be quite – y'know if you think you're going to get fitted up or something it could be quite scary couldn't it y'know if you think

Hasan: But I said er 'I know your brother' so he got scared [...] I showed him who was boss y'see.

Several: [laugh]

The inference to be drawn from Hasan's narrative was that a police officer had tried to incriminate him by planting cannabis on his person, but that he had relented in the face of Hasan's overt challenge to his authority. Of course, there is no guarantee that this incident occurred in the manner described by Hasan, or indeed if it had happened at all. Important here is that Hasan's claimed response within the focus group context was bound up with what he felt to be an appropriate response to perceived police harassment for a young, black man: a response characterised by toughness, fearlessness and bravado. This understanding of tough masculinity was echoed by Leroy (Focus Group 7) who, in talking of being attacked by the Mudmen, added that 'we all just ran off and started throwing bricks back at them, bottles and everything'. Likewise, discussing conflicts with white youths, Dean claimed that he and his friends did not 'go around looking for scraps [but] we don't really want to back down'. In this respect, these understandings of racism were bound up with particular culturally meaningful understandings of risk and gender.

By contrast, girls and young women asserted that they tried to ignore acts of racial abuse, positioning themselves as more traditionally feminine in doing so. This is exemplified in the following extract:

Focus Group 16:

- Amita: Yeah it happens like, it happens quite a lot like it happens like a lot like like other people like we don't even like, it's kind of normal for us do y'know what I mean? We don't kind of pay attention to it
- Raima: I just laugh
- Amita: Yeah, but like it's like got to the point were you just laugh about it and you just

Serena: That's all you can do about it.

As with the young men, the women resigned themselves to the fact that racial harassment was a routine aspect of their everyday lives. Yet, in asserting that racism was a risk they should ignore rather than respond to, the women's narrative was also bound up with deep-seated cultural understandings of feminine respectability.

The women also tended to discuss risk in far more general terms than the men, frequently displacing experiences of racism onto friends or relatives or downplaying the extent to which racism was experienced. For example, in a discussion of how media concerns around youth and knife crime corresponded to their own everyday lives the women spoke only of the experiences of others, Asal's reference of an incident in which a male cousin had been chased by white youths carrying knives being a typical feature of their narrative. Also, developing their accounts of experiences of racial abuse, Ruksana noted that 'I've only ever had like one time where I've had someone be like that' while Anila similarly stated that 'it only happened to me once as well'. Here, the utterances 'only', 'one time' or 'once' worked to downgrade the extent of actual experiences of racism. The women also tended to draw more extensively upon local knowledges of racism, citing media reports or anecdotal evidence of racism in their risk narratives. In talking of places she avoided, for instance, Anila referred not to personal experiences, but to the much publicised racially-motivated murder of Anthony Walker in Huyton in 2005, asserting that: 'Black people that I know wouldn't probably go up to Huyton any more'.

This relative absence of references to direct encounters with racism did not, however, mean that the women felt any less at risk in certain areas of Liverpool than did the men. Indeed, the women expressed a strong sense of exclusion from parts of the city, understandings of racism again working to submit the women to a form of symbolic violence. For instance, adding to her observation that she had only been verbally abused on one occasion, Anila commented that she nevertheless felt she was treated differently because of her ethnicity and that she was aware of 'the attitude they've got with me', and Serena, again expressing a sense of being an outsider, noted that 'it's the way they look at you as well'. In this respect, understanding risk in terms of racism, regardless of whether or not this was something they directly experienced, continued to exert a powerful hold over their sense of belonging.

The risk narratives generated by boys (Focus Group 13) also differed from that produced by girls (Focus Group 14). Paralleling the accounts of the men, the boys spoke briefly of engagement in fights with white boys, again associating racism with certain areas of Liverpool. The girls followed the women in tending to focus on the risk practices of boys rather than on their own. What united the boys and girls, however, was their tendency to say relatively little about such issues. As I discussed in Chapter Two, problems were encountered in both organising and operating these two groups and this certainly did impact upon their overall engagement in focused discussions. At the same time, however, I was left with the sense that for both groups everyday life was characterised by a more limited spatial mobility on account of the material and discursive aspects of age (see Chapter Four), resulting in experiences of racism being far less extensive than those of their older counterparts.

Variations according to gender and age notwithstanding, these narratives were strongly patterned according to ethnicity; risk routinely being associated with racism. In this respect, focus groups proved useful in bringing particular experiences and understandings of risk to the fore. Further, the interactive processes associated with the method helped to generate data which illustrate how understandings of risk vary according to ethnic location and its interactions with other social positions. This was further evidenced in the risk narratives generated by white youth which, as I illustrate in the following section, typically produced quite different understandings of risk.

'It's them people': White Youth, Risk and Ethnic Distinctions

Whereas those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds routinely associated risk with racism such a link was less evident in the risk narratives generated by white youths. Reflecting life in different neighbourhoods and a very different relationship to the habitus, most said little or nothing of issues related to ethnicity or racism. Where related issues were discussed they were more strongly informed by gender and class position as I have noted elsewhere. Nonetheless, narratives did reveal something of the taken-for-grantedness of Liverpool as a white space and, at least on some occasions, revealed particular aspects of the material and discursive dimensions of risk and ethnicity as understood by white youth.

Several of the white, middle-class men (Focus Group 9) discussed racially motivated conflict. Here, however, emphasis lay with the actions of white, working-class men associated with the Mudmen rather than their own everyday lives. Indeed, these

young men overtly distanced themselves from such forms of racism, speaking disparagingly of 'gangs [...] picking on the black people' and positioning themselves as morally superior in doing so. This positioning was also strongly nuanced by class location as I discuss in the next chapter, these men denouncing this gang on account of what was perceived to be their 'low intellect' and the fact that they did not live in a 'decent area'.

Young people living in areas with very similar socio-economic characteristics to Princes Park also said little that could be construed as constructing risk as practices relating to ethnicity. Boys (Focus Group 11) and women (Focus Group 12) made one or two passing references to issues appertaining to ethnicity, though in both cases this was simply not an issue of any apparent significance. While Speke has very similar levels of social and economic deprivation to Princes Park, the visible minority ethnic population is just 4.1%, half the rate for Liverpool as a whole and far less than the 38% which makes up Princes Park (City of Liverpool, 2009). Working-class women living in Walton (Focus Group 6) also said nothing of racism or ethnicity. Again these women shared very similar material conditions to black or minority ethnic youths but, as with Speke, lived in an area with a very small non-white population, 97% of the area's residents being white (City of Liverpool, 2009). In these cases then, reflecting very different social and cultural contexts, risks relating to ethnicity and racism appeared not to feature prominently in their everyday lives.

Indeed, only rarely did any of the white youths associate risk practices with ethnicity. Both white, middle-class, women (Focus Group 4) and men (Focus Group 5) spoke about confrontations with young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds,

albeit briefly. Further, where such issues were discussed, understandings of risk were found to be informed as much by gender as by ethnicity. As I discussed in Chapter Five, many of the girls and young women associated risk with threats of violence and sexual assault, these risks frequently being related to specific places in Liverpool. The white, middle-class women's (Focus Group 4) discussion did, however, assume something of a racialised character. During a more general discussion of risky places attention shifted towards the Smithdown Road area of the city. This lies on the border of Princes Park and is similarly characterised by a high density black or minority ethnic population. Rebecca and Leah co-produced an account of this area as one in which they felt especially vulnerable. Rebecca asserted she avoided the area on account of having been advised by a relative who is a police officer that there had been a spate of sexual assaults there in recent months. Leah recounted a recent occasion when she had been accosted by a group of young men whilst walking through the area with a friend after they had been out drinking describing this incident as 'quite scary'. Throughout this joint narrative there was no explicit association of the risk of sexual assault with black or minority ethnic youth. However, implicit in Rebecca's narrative was a strong suggestion that such a risk was indeed understood in these terms:

Focus Group 4:

Rebecca: [...] A month or two ago that I got told, I don't know whether it's still going on or whether they've caught the people, but erm, me brother's wife is just like 'don't go there!' and I mean like, you know the Brookhouse is quite close to there and she was like 'don't even go the Brookhouse!' erm - but it's them people, I think we all know like ...

In this brief account risk was clearly gendered in that it was closely associated with threats of male sexual violence. Yet, while not referring explicitly to black or minority ethnic youth, Rebecca's utterance, 'them people' and her unfinished assertion that 'we all know', an observation tacitly accepted by the rest of the group through nods of agreement, conveyed an implicit assumption that the risk of sexual assault was understood as being greater in areas populated by young men from such backgrounds.

Young, white, men similarly generated a highly gendered risk narrative with conflicts with other men being a persistent feature of their account. Again however, these discussions occasionally assumed a racialised character, several references being made to confrontations with black youth in particular. Neil provided a detailed account of an incident in which he had been confronted by a group of younger black girls while travelling with friends on a bus through Princes Park. Neil described the girls as engaging in nuisance behaviour, 'rolling joints' and 'kicking off' before throwing a milkshake over him and accusing him of making racist comments. This was followed by one of the girls attacking him, an incident described by Neil thus:

Focus Group 5:

Neil: [...] I didn't know what she was going to do and then she started bringing her arm around as if she was going to hit me so I just grabbed her to stop her, no I wasn't going to hit her back, y'know I wouldn't do that and she was like 'get-off me! get-off me!' like that and then she brought out a lighter and an aerosol an' started spraying at me so I just had to get up and go down the bottom deck and erm - what did she throw, she threw like a Sprite on me or something so I was covered in er sugar from

the Sprite and it got so close, all the sugar started burning me face and I was like 'ah I'm not having this' ...

Neil expanded this account, noting that while trying to escape the situation he was chased by the girls who 'grabbed me hair and pulled me hair' and adding that a couple in their twenties who 'were black as well' stood by and 'just laughed at me' as he jumped off the bus. Neil's narrative was extended by Jon who recalled an incident in which a 'big gang of black lads' had attempted to rob him of his mobile phone, though according to this account Jon had managed to fend off the attack.

As I discussed in Chapter Six, this co-produced risk narrative was clearly informed by gender position and specific performances of a culturally approved masculinity. However, it was also informed by ethnic position. Although Neil vehemently denied he had been racist his stress here was very much on the ethnic identity of his assailants, an emphasis absent in his accounts of conflicts with white youths. This racialised understanding of risk was even more explicit in Jon's account. Not only did he likewise refer to 'race' and ethnicity only when speaking of black youth, but his narrative also contained the use of a mock Jamaican accent when reporting on comments made by his assailants. Further, throughout their risk narrative these young men often positioned black youth as a *threatening other* by associating them with risk practices involving violent behaviour. Hence, Jon, uttering a disclaimer aimed at preventing his view from being seen negatively by me and others in the group, contended that 'I don't mean to be racist but it is normally black people who do it'. Likewise, Neil, rather less ambiguously, made a clear association between black youth and what he claimed was their 'gang-mentality':

Focus Group 5:

Neil: [...] there's never one, they're always in a massive group, like you get all these big Somalian gangs like that and it's like, like they sort of, I don't know what it is, it's like they sort of like they like that sort of gang mentality thing and they like going around in big gangs and just like just starting fights with white boys

On the whole, issues of racism and ethnicity were largely silent in the risk narratives of white youth, those living in predominantly white neighbourhoods producing very different understandings and experiences of risk compared to black or minority ethnic youth. For those who did encounter black or minority ethnic youth in their everyday lives the tendency was to construct them as a 'threatening other', again enacting a form of symbolic violence.

In these risk narratives ethnicity was found to interact with cultural discourses of risk and gender in important ways. White males constructed black or minority ethnic youth as a risk population on account of their perceived association with crime and gang-related violence: the women, by contrast, emphasised what they saw as a sexualised threat. These understandings of risk contrasted starkly with those produced by black or minority ethnic youth, both males and females constructing white youth as potential perpetrators of some form of racism, albeit in different gendered ways.

‘Anfield is packed with dealers and drugs’: Black Youth, Risk and Ethnic Distinctions

Various risk practices were often mobilised as forms of devalued symbolic capital, young people expressing a range of judgements of taste as regards alcohol consumption, drug-use and violence and so forth. In this way certain risk practices operated both as markers of ethnic distinctions and as indicators of the moral positioning of selves and others. Again, however, constructions of risk practices and their function as symbolic capital were often informed by other social locations. Further, the extent to which risks marked ethnic distinctions typically varied so that while some narratives fell into clear patterns, in other cases the process was more ambivalent.

As noted above, some of the white men associated gang-related violence primarily with certain black youths, Jon and Neil’s co-produced risk narrative constructing violence as a symbolic marker of ethnic difference. In doing so, this risk practice simultaneously invoked a moral distinction, the men constructing themselves as the innocent victims of such violence or abuse and certain black men as the likely perpetrators. However, on the whole, such discursive marking of ethnic distinctions was largely absent in the risk narratives of white youths, being far more prevalent in the groups comprising black or minority ethnic youth (Focus Groups 7, 13, 14, 15 and 16).

Associating risks primarily with racism and particular areas of Liverpool, black or minority ethnic young people simultaneously reproduced social distinctions,

constructions of their 'safe spaces' being intricately interwoven with their sense of ethnic identity and serving to distinguish the kind of people they were not. Many expressed awareness of numerous risky practices associated with the social milieu in which they lived, frequent references being made to violent crime and drug-use for example. However, the extent of such practices was typically downgraded, the dominant tendency being to construct their immediate neighbourhoods as relatively safe. For example, some of the girls were at great pains to present their neighbourhood in favourable terms:

Focus Group 14:

- Amaani: It's not fair really because, I know in Toxteth there's actually guns and everything but it does not happen every single day. You don't really see people getting stabbed and that.
- Ruby: They don't usually carry knives.
- Amaani: They don't, the only usual thing they carry is drugs
- Ruby: Yeah, they sell drugs, weed an that, that's all they're doing.
- Amaani: No, you don't see no evidence of knife-use, you don't really see that. But they do say like that Toxteth is the worst, but you don't really see it when you're right there.

While the presence of certain risk practices in Toxteth was acknowledged, their significance was played down: violent crime was constructed as a rarity while Ruby's utterance that 'that's all they're doing' define drug-use as a not especially risky practice.

Several young men made similar claims. For instance, claiming that Toxteth was 'not actually that bad', Dwight (Focus Group 15) noted how only a small number of people he knew were involved in drugs and that violent crime was rare. Further, Toxteth was

contrasted with other, white dominated, areas which were positioned as posing greater risks with regards to drug-use and violent crime. For example, Dwight noted in respect of gun crime that 'it's just always been in Croxteth' (a predominantly white, working class area which has in recent years become both discursively and materially synonymous with gang culture), while speaking of drug culture he commented that:

Focus Group 15:

Dwight: ... If I go to a different area, somewhere like Kensington like there's just like loads of crackheads just walking through and they are getting it from over the road at Anfield where people are just supplying them with drugs. Anfield is packed with dealers and drugs [Kensington and Anfield are predominantly white, working-class areas in inner-city Liverpool. Both have high levels of deprivation]

Other young men (Focus Group 7) living in Toxteth were similarly resentful of the area's poor reputation. Discussing experiences of racism and encounters with other youth in less familiar parts of the city, Nathan, Jermaine and Dean all noted that generally they felt safe in their own neighbourhood:

Focus Group 7:

Nathan: Yeah, Toxteth has got like the bad reputation, all that L8 and stuff but I feel safer round here than when I go out with all me mates somewhere else but I think that's just cos erm I live here do y'know what I mean?

[...]

Jermaine: Toxteth gets the name for being bad, everyone thinks it's bad but really it's not as bad as everyone says it is.

Dean: There's worse areas.

Through these narratives young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds tended to construct their home neighbourhood as safe and familiar, simultaneously positioning themselves and those with whom they shared ethnic identification, as relatively non-risky. By contrast, certain white areas, and by extension certain white youth, were constructed as posing a greater risk.

Other risk practices were found to be constructed as forms of symbolic capital through which social and moral distinctions were reproduced; alcohol consumption and drug-use being particularly significant in this regard. Reference to engagement in these practices was largely absent in risk narratives generated by black or minority ethnic youth, especially females who said nothing of such risk practices. Boys and young men did say more, though here the stress lay largely with *other* young people's risk practices. For instance, boys (Focus Group 13) explicitly distanced themselves from alcohol consumption, all asserting they did not drink. Amongst the men (Focus Group 7) while Dean, Nathan and Jermaine distinguished themselves from the rest of the group by claiming to drink, albeit only on rare occasions, the other men all asserted that they never drank. Likewise, other men (Focus Group 15) positioned themselves as non-drinkers, my question of whether alcohol featured in their everyday lives being responded to with an emphatic 'no'. These men went further, inasmuch as alcohol consumption was constructed very much as a *white* risk practice:

Focus Group 15:

Fadil: I think they are for white people to be honest with you.

Dave: In what way?

Fadil: Like, not that many black people get drunk on a regular basis

This understanding of alcohol consumption was augmented by Dwight who felt that the majority of people stopped by police for binge drinking were white, and Hasan, who claimed he only ever saw white people being sick because of drinking. Similarly, as I discussed in Chapter Six, these young men associated drug-use primarily with white youths and constructed black youths drug-dealing as a means out of poverty. In this respect, practices related to alcohol consumption and drug-use were constructed very much as *white* risks.

Such constructions of risk were imbued with moral judgements. The boys (Focus Group 13) were highly critical of young people who drank alcohol, Nazmi and Anwaar's co-produced account of people in their neighbourhood 'screaming and shouting' on account of being 'totally drunk' being uttered in a clear tone of moral condemnation. Amongst the men who did profess to drink the frequency with which they did so was invariably downgraded:

Focus Group 7:

Jermaine: I, I, I went once, I went into town, I got into a club once, I think that was about it

[...]

Dean: No I don't drink, I never, I never really drink it was just a one off occasion – I thought, y'know me and everyone else having a bevvie so might as well have a go but, it's it's not a regular basis that I do, don't drink or smoke so

Through these narratives Dean and Jermaine re-positioned themselves morally as sensible drinkers, simultaneously re-aligning themselves more closely with those in

the group such as Leroy and Jamilah who expressed overtly critical judgements of taste regarding alcohol consumption.

Other men (Focus Group 15) contended that a key reason for their abstinence was a desire not to upset their parents, here differentiating themselves from white youths who they regarded as having 'no respect for their parents'. These men also positioned themselves as rational and sensible in this regard, Fadil posing the question 'why would I want to spend all my money on drinks?' and Dwight expressing incredulity at people who spend so much money on alcohol.

In discussing risks in such terms these young men were not simply describing what they considered to be everyday risks, rather they were engaging in processes of identity work, positioning themselves as both responsible, risk-averse young men vis-à-vis alcohol and drug-related activities, and as morally superior to those white youths who did engage in such practices. In doing so, they also contested the symbolic violence to which they are routinely subjected, expressing judgements of taste in ways that positioned white youth as morally inferior.

Yet, risk practices did not always straightforwardly operate to mark ethnic distinctions. In particular, as I discussed in Chapter Five, black or minority ethnic women (Focus Group 16) constructed risk practices such as knife crime in highly gendered terms as a feature of masculinity. At the same time, however, they contested the suggestion that such crime was associated primarily with black youth:

Focus Group 16:

- Raima: when people think 'oh lads goin' out with knives' they think of black lads
- Several: Yeah, yeah
- Raima: no, but I reckon it's all lads anyway
- Ruksana: exactly, it can be anyone but when people think about it they just think 'oh erm, black lads and knives' and that but, but it's all over the city, no matter where you are
- Anila: yeah, all around is the same, well not the same but like similar, whoever hangs around
- Amita: it's how you're brought up isn't it, it is
- Ruksana: it's not only black lads that hang round, it's white lads hanging round who do it

In this instance, conversational interactions brought very different understandings of risk to the fore. For these young women, certain risk practices were understood, not as being associated with either black or white youths, but with 'all lads'. Further, reflecting different material realities and varying cultural understandings of risk and gender, their narrative was imbued with a clear moral judgement of knife crime. Through expressing such moral judgements, the women simultaneously positioned themselves as non-violent and respectable while reproducing a boundary between themselves and *both* white and black males who engage in knife related violence. At the same time, however, the women also worked to contest governmental youth risk discourses which construct black youth in particular as an especially risky population. The significance of ethnicity was challenged via an association of knife crime with Liverpool youth more generally and through the mobilisation of a general moral discourse in which upbringing was constructed as the over-riding factor influencing

young men's attitudes. In this respect therefore, moral judgements of risk were informed by gender and class position as much as by ethnicity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated how understandings and experiences of risk were found to relate to ethnicity. Both white youths and those from black or ethnic minority backgrounds drew extensively on an interpretative repertoire which understands risk as external threat. However, reflecting the different material, social and cultural contexts in which their everyday lives were lived, such risks were understood in very different terms.

Liverpool has a long and deep-rooted history of racial tensions and the city's population continues to be largely segregated according to ethnic divisions as I noted in Chapter Three. For those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds these factors clearly informed their narratives, risk routinely being associated with experiences or expectations of racial abuse or harassment. By contrast, white youths, who were drawn from areas with very few people from black or ethnic minority backgrounds, said little of risk that could be construed in such racialised terms. This variation in experiences and understandings of risk was a powerful theme to emerge from my research.

While strongly patterned by ethnicity, my data also showed variations *within* different ethnic groups according to age and gender. Amongst white youth, it was only some of

those aged 16-18 who made any reference to risk in a way that could be understood in racialised terms: younger and older groups said nothing relating to such issues. The risk narratives of the 16-18 year-olds differed according to gender: women associating young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds with threats of sexual violence, the young men expressing a link with black youth and gangs. Age and gender differences were more marked in the groups of young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds. Boys, girls and young women focused far more extensively on *expectations* of racism or the experiences of *others*: only rarely were direct experiences discussed. Young men, by contrast, spoke at much greater length about a broad range of encounters with both verbal and physical forms of racism. What this illustrates is that while understandings and experiences of risk are strongly patterned by ethnicity, this cannot simply be disaggregated from other social positions.

Despite differences in whether racism was encountered directly or indirectly, this understanding of risk was nonetheless translated into a powerful sense of belonging to Toxteth, but as being excluded from many other parts of Liverpool. In this respect, my data support research which points to the existence of racialised geographies in other parts of the UK as discussed above. Much of the city was effectively constructed as a space in which black or minority ethnic youth felt out of place. This understanding of risk was intertwined with identity work. Regardless of age or gender, black and minority ethnic youth understood Liverpool very much as a *white* space. As such, risk narratives were found to reproduce a symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1997/2000) whereby these young people positioned themselves as excluded outsiders who do not fully belong in Liverpool. For their part, white youths said little to

evoke a sense of belonging on account of ethnicity. This not only reflected the different material contexts in which their everyday lives were experienced, but also a taken-for-granted assumption that Liverpool is primarily a *white* space. Popular notions of the 'Scouser' (a term used to describe people from Liverpool) continue to evoke a powerful image of a white, working-class identity. This discursive construction of a Liverpool identity clearly informed the risk narratives of the young people in my investigation.

The ethnic patterning of risk was also evident in respect of practices associated with a potential for causing personal harm, white and black or minority ethnic youth again speaking of such risks in very different ways. White youth were more inclined to discuss engagement in practices relating to alcohol and associated modes of socialisation. Conversely, black or minority ethnic youth said little about such practices, suggesting that these simply did not feature as part of their everyday lives. Importantly, this challenges claims made by post-subcultural theorists that youth cultural tastes and practices display considerable overlap and that the boundaries between different ethnic groups have blurred. This was clearly *not* apparent in my research.

More significantly, such risk practices were found to be discussed in ways that *reaffirmed* ethnic differences. Young men from black or minority ethnic backgrounds in particular constructed practices such as excessive alcohol consumption and drug-use as *white* practices. These risks were, in this sense, mobilised as devalued forms of symbolic capital through which white youth were positioned as morally inferior, less responsible and more risky. Risks were again found to be bound up with

understandings of ethnic identity, both being used to contest the symbolic violence through which black and minority ethnic youth are denigrated as *other*, and marking points of distinction between themselves and white youth.

My research contradicts claims made by both advocates of detraditionalisation and individualisation, and post-subcultural theorists who suggest that youth cultural practices are no longer as clearly bound to ethnic identity. Rather, as I have shown, experiences and understandings of risk were clearly related to ethnicity, often being used in ways that worked to express and maintain ethnic distinctions. In this respect, my work builds on the claims of more recent youth studies researchers who attest to the importance of locality and the various related material, cultural, social and symbolic factors which help to shape young people's meanings, values and identities (Henderson et al., 2007).

Introduction: Risk, Class and Distinctions

In recent years there has been much debate as to the importance of social-class in informing youth cultural practices. As I noted in Chapter One, traditionally it was working-class youth who were widely associated with risk practices, particularly crime and deviancy (Pearson, 1983, 2006; France, 2008; Muncie, 2009). Early research from the United States saw the deviant or criminal practices of lower class youth gangs and subcultures as constituting a rational response to the social conditions in which many young people found themselves (Cohen, A., 1955; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; Matza, 1964). Much British research likewise located various subcultural practices within a broader social context. Most notably, researchers at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) regarded subcultures as sites of working-class resistance to dominant, that is, middle-class, values (Clarke et al., 1975; Hebdige, 1979; Willis, 1977).

However, recent decades have seen attempts being made to uncouple the link between class and youth cultural practices. These discussions are closely related to broader debates regarding the contemporary nature of class structure in Western societies. For instance, several post-modern writers have long since pointed to the declining significance of social class as an important informant of lifestyles and opportunities (see Miles (2001) for an overview). In a similar vein, both Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) have suggested that late modernity is characterised by the

disembedding of social relations from traditional structural constraints such as class. In this context, it is suggested that individuals are increasingly able to 'choose between different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities' (Beck, 1992:131). Certainly, looking at youth culture there is some evidence to support this. Several writers who are grouped together loosely under the banner of post-subcultural studies, indicate that working- and middle-class tastes and practices have converged and that youth cultural affiliations no longer articulate class antagonisms (Roberts and Parsell, 1994; Roberts, 1997). The key informant of youth cultural identity and practice is, in other words, not so much class position, but individual agency and consumer choice. In her account of rave culture, for instance, Sarah Thornton (1995:12) maintains that club-culture is a *taste culture* in which 'class is wilfully obfuscated'. For Thornton, it is not the case that class is irrelevant, rather that it is no longer the primary informant of club-cultures' music and stylistic conventions. This is echoed by Muggleton (2000:158) who contends that today's subcultural members are more inclined to display 'fragmented, heterogeneous, and individualistic stylistic identification' rather than identify with a class-based subcultural identity. In a similar vein, Andy Bennett (1999, 2001) argues that, reflecting the fluid and unstable character of contemporary society more generally, dance scenes and youth lifestyles are based on appearance and form rather than being underpinned by class position. The point is echoed by Miles (2000) who contends that social change has led to youth lifestyles being informed ever more by media and consumption; practices such as clubbing and drinking constituting replacements for the loss of a more traditional class-based community and sense of common identity.

These sorts of claims, however, grossly underestimate the continued importance of locality, tradition, class and community in shaping young people's cultural practices and choices (France, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008). Certainly the close homology between class position and subcultural styles and practices as postulated by the CCCS struggles to withstand close scrutiny: the suggestion that subcultures in the contemporary era articulate a form of class-resistance is difficult to sustain and in terms of tastes in music, fashion and leisure practices, at least some blurring of class boundaries is evident. But this is not the same as saying that class no longer matters, as is illustrated by a number of recent youth studies researchers. In her study of black, working-class youth in Manchester, for instance, Martina Böse (2003) found that a lack of money was routinely cited as the principal factor which prevented them from participating in the night-time leisure economy. Research into Goth and Chav/Charver subcultures also assert the importance of class: the former being more likely to come from middle-class backgrounds (McCulloch, Stewart and Lovegreen, 2006); the latter more inclined to adopt street-based practices reflective of their lack of disposable income and their tendency to be excluded from leisure venues (Nayak, 2006; Shildrick, 2006; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). Likewise, in her work with young people living in Northern Ireland undertaken as part of the *Inventing Adulthoods* project, Rachel Thomson (2011) notes how style operates as a signifier of classed identity. Such evidence suggests that the case made by many post-subcultural theorists as to the demise of class as an informant of youth cultural practices is grossly overstated.

It is in respect of youth risks and risky youth, however, that such claims are most problematic. Analysis of the social distribution of various risks associated with late

modern youth-to-adult transitions, for example, points to the persistence of deep-seated class-based inequalities (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007). Those engaged in qualitative research into how such risks are experienced and negotiated likewise point to very different patterns of experience according to both where young people live and their class position (Jones, 2002, Catan, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Shildrick, Blackman and MacDonald, 2009). Such disparities are also evident as regards certain risk practices associated with youth culture more broadly. Hence, while practices such as drug-use and alcohol consumption now form part of the youth cultural landscape more generally, risks relating to violence and crime remain heavily stacked according to class and neighbourhood locations. As Henderson and her colleagues (2007) point out, the places and neighbourhood spaces that young people grow up in contributes to the level and forms of crime that they are exposed to and that they may become involved in: where young people have a strong sense of attachment to a neighbourhood then engagement in violent crime is more likely. Related, those who lack access to the resources required to participate in the excitement and pleasure afforded by the leisure-based centres of modern Britain may instead engage in problematised risk practices such as, for example, car theft, petty thieving, shoplifting, street-centred drinking and drug-use (Brain, Parker and Carnworth, 2000; France, 2007). This is especially so in Liverpool where risks relating to violent street crime, anti-social behaviour and problematic alcohol consumption or drug-use are closely intertwined with particular neighbourhood spaces as I discussed in Chapter Three.

That class continues to matter is also evident in the discursive aspects of risk and identity. As I argued in Chapter Three, class is embedded in governmental youth risk

discourses (Walton, 2006; Mooney and Young, 2006; France, 2007; Crawford, 2009; McDowell, 2009). This is especially so across news media where various euphemistic terms are used to problematise young people from working-class backgrounds. Traditional ways of marking working-class youth as threatening, inferior and lacking respectability (Skeggs, 1997) have not diminished in the wake of the social, cultural and economic changes of late modernity; rather they have been re-worked in new ways. For instance, Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues (2001) show how class operates discursively to construct young women's bodies, and especially their fecundity, in oppositional ways according to class position: young, middle-class women are positioned as the 'superwoman, who cannot have a baby for fear of interrupting her career'; working-class women as 'the scrounger, whose very fecundity ensures her 'career' as a welfare mother' (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001:215). Likewise, young working-class women engaging in risky drinking practices are frequently constructed as loud, excessive, drunk, fat, vulgar, disgusting, immoral and repellent (Skeggs, 2005; McRobbie, 2009), while derogative terms such as 'chav' (or its numerous regional variations such as 'neds' (Scotland), 'charvers' (North-east England) or 'scallies' (Liverpool)), 'yob', 'gang', 'feral youth', 'hoodie' and so forth are routinely used in depicting certain groups from within the working-class. In this sense, governmental youth risk discourses, especially those articulated via mass media, continue to enact a symbolic violence which works to 'condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence' (Bourdieu, 1979/1984:511) those viewed as having the *wrong* tastes and as engaging in the *wrong* practices.

Such discursive markers of class distinction are often cited and reproduced by young people themselves. Walkerdine et al., (2001) go on to indicate how discourses of the

working-class scrounger and the middle-class superwoman inform both how young women and their bodies are regulated and how they regulate themselves and each other in different ways according to their class locations. Similarly, in their research into middle-class sixth formers, Kelhily and Pattman (2006) note how terms evocative of the notion of an underclass, such as 'wasters' and 'yobs', were used to describe working-class students who had dropped out of school and who now worked in low status jobs. Kelhily and Pattman go on to indicate that the sixth formers often pathologised working-class students, associating their engagement in practices such as smoking, drinking and drug-taking, with the manufacturing of a tough and bad image, pressure to conform and a desire to impress others. Conversely, while acknowledging that they too engaged in similar practices this was presented as evidence of their own individuality and their ability to make rational choices. Risk practices and a range of class-based discursive tropes were, in this regard, mobilised to produce stark class distinctions. In a similar vein, middle-class youth often cite chav discourses in positioning young working-class people and their leisure and consumption practices as inferior and unintelligible (Holt and Griffin, 2005; Lawler, 2005b; Hayward and Yar, 2006; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). Further, working-class youth have been shown to cite chav discourses by way of reproducing distinctions between *respectable* and *non-respectable* working-class: Nayak's (2006) account of 'real Geordies' and their attempts to distinguish themselves from 'Charvers' through the denigration of the latter's assumed poor tastes in fashion and music, and their proclivity for hanging around on the streets, drinking beer and smoking cannabis being particularly illustrative in this respect.

Such accounts attest to the continued salience of class, not just in terms of material inequalities and differential associations with various risk practices, but also in explicating how class discourses are cited in the expression and reproduction of class distinctions. Judgements of tastes are central to this process: working-class youth seek respectability by disidentifying with pathologised constructions of working-class taste (Skeggs, 1997); middle-class youth distinguish themselves by expressing 'disgust reactions' (Tyler, 2008) through which working-class youth and their practices are classified as tasteless, vulgar and threatening. Such discursive strategies function to reproduce middle-class identities which are dependent on *not* being the repellent, disgusting, immoral, even worthless 'other' (Skeggs, 2005; Lawler, 2005b). Consequently, as Nayak succinctly puts it in his analysis of 'real Geordies' and 'Charvers', in considering contemporary youth cultures, class:

continues to be threaded through the daily fabric of their lives: it is stitched into codes of respect, accent, dress, music, bodily adornment and comportment. In short, the affective politics of class is a felt practice, tacitly understood and deeply internalised (Nayak, 2006:828)

These accounts do not always take youth risks and risky youth as their main point of analysis. Rather, their central focus lies with the relationship between class and a broader array of tastes, consumption and leisure patterns. Nonetheless, they draw attention to the continued importance of class and how judgements of certain practices and certain groups often express and maintain class distinctions.

In this chapter I build on these recent investigations into the continued saliency of social class by discussing data from focus groups comprising young people

occupying different class and neighbourhood locations in Liverpool. Groups were made up of individuals drawn from similar National Statistics Socio-Economic Groups (NS-SEG) and who lived in neighbourhoods with similar socio-economic characteristics and Index of Multiple Deprivation rankings (See Appendix 1 and Figs. 10, 11 and 12 in Chapter Three, pp.91-2). This allowed for the identification of patterns of experiences and understandings of risk practice as they relate to social class and neighbourhood. As I now show, risk narratives were found to be patterned in important ways, both in terms of experiences and understandings of everyday risks and how risks were used symbolically to delineate class-based distinctions. Again, however, the extent to which class was found to matter varied according to interactions of class with other social positions.

'It's quite a dodgy area': Working-class Youth and Risk

Working-class focus groups comprised young people living in the Princes Park, Speke and Walton areas of Liverpool. As I noted in Chapter Three, these sit among the 5% most deprived areas in England and suffer relatively high levels of crime, unemployment, poor housing and low educational attainment compared to many other parts of the city (Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2007; City of Liverpool, 2009). The young people living in these areas represented social backgrounds problematised through governmental discourses as being pervaded by violent crime, anti-social behaviour, excessive alcohol consumption and drug-use.

Such risk practices were constructed as a normal aspect of everyday life. Indeed,

throughout these narratives working-class youths tended to draw upon an interpretative repertoire (Wetherell, 1999) through which risk is associated with practices understood as having some potential for personal harm. Several young women, most of whom were under 18, talked of their experiences of excessive alcohol consumption. Ashlea, Sophie, Gemma and Sara's account (Focus Group 6) included references to having made themselves unsafe or vulnerable to sexual assault, as I noted in Chapter Five when discussing femininity. Gemma, for instance, spoke of a 'terrible experience' involving her consuming 'half-a-bottle of Bacardi in about ten minutes' which had resulted in her being hospitalised. Sara referred to a similar episode where having drunk excessive volumes of vodka she had awoken the next morning to find her face covered in bruises but unable to recollect how this had happened. And Ashlea, who spoke most extensively about her alcohol consumption, referred to several incidents where she had been vulnerable to sexual assault on account of her being drunk. Such experiences were constructed as being commonplace for these young working-class women, class interacting with particular cultural understandings of gender and age.

Clare, Jackie and Julie (Focus Group 12) also constructed alcohol consumption as a normal aspect of everyday life. Jackie noted she always drank on a weekend and Clare that she was a regular drinker. Indeed, for these women alcohol consumption was constructed as a common feature of life on the Speke estate. As Julie noted, 'it can get loud y'know when like everyone's drinking outside'. Here the phrase 'everyone's drinking' operated as an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) through which certain activities and behaviours were constructed as normal. For these women, however, there was little awareness of either the risks associated with

alcohol, or that their alcohol consumption practices worked to position them as members of a risk population. This was illustrated by Clare's implied understanding of risk as *illegal* activities, evidenced by her use of a disclaimer that her drinking was unproblematic as she was 18. As she put it: 'it's not like binge drinking for me cos I am legal', and again: 'Because I am legal, it's not like it's against the law for me to drink'.

Risk practices around drug-use also featured across several working-class narratives. A small number of young women spoke of having used drugs: Ashlea noted she had 'smoked weed once or twice' and Jane and Jackie (Focus Group 12) both said they smoked cannabis on occasion. However, most of these young people either stated they did not use drugs or simply did not discuss the topic. Nevertheless, where they were discussed then drugs were constructed as a prominent feature of working-class Liverpool. Boys living in Speke (Focus Group 11) noted that there were 'drugs circling round' and that it was 'not difficult to fall into the wrong crowd'. Ashlea and Gemma (Focus Group 6) commented that the use of 'weed and skunk' was commonplace in Walton and Gemma added that the use of ecstasy, cocaine, skunk and weed were routinely witnessed in many of the parties she attended. Suzanne and Jayne likewise suggested several of their friends used drugs and Katrina that she often saw boys as young as 10 smoking cannabis near her home. Cannabis use in particular was constructed as a normal aspect of their particular social and cultural milieu:

Focus Group 6:

Ashlea: [...] it's like it seems like the normal thing to smoke weed.

- Sara: It's just like everyone just smokes now
- Gemma: Just smokes normally.
- Sara: Like 12 year olds smoke and then cos they see the older ones smoking like weed and that they think 'all right we're smoking a ciggie so we may as well smoke weed'
- Sophie: Yeah it's like its normal progression

Working-class women living in Speke (Focus Group 12) also constructed drug-use as an everyday risk practice. Jackie and Julie respectively observed that there were 'loads of drugs' and 'a lot of people in Speke take drugs'. Jackie made the additional point that 'everyone will most probably've gone through the stage of taking drugs' and that 'everyone's going to try it once in their life'. Throughout these narratives linguistic repertoires such as 'everyone just smokes' and 'it's normal progression' worked to construct drug-use as a normal, even acceptable, aspect of growing-up in a profoundly deprived, working-class, part of Liverpool.

Other risk practices frequently associated with working-class youth were unprotected sex (Focus Group 6) and the perceived threat of violence or assault within their neighbourhoods (Focus Groups 6, 11, 12, 14 and 15). However, reflecting different material realities and varying culturally related risk discourses, these narratives were also informed by specific interactions of class with gender. Young women were more inclined to construct local neighbourhoods as risky. Gemma and Ashlea (Focus Group 6) described parts of their neighbourhood as 'rough' and 'dodgy' on account of there being 'really drunk people' and 'druggies'. Some also spoke of their concerns about taking the night-bus home from the city-centre. Both Jayne and Suzanne saw this as doubly problematic, firstly on account of the fact that 'there's always like loads

of dead drunken weirdoes and things on buses', and secondly, that taking the bus meant that she then had to 'get off at the bus stop on your own'. The women living in Speke (Focus Group 12) likewise saw their neighbourhood as characterised by the potential for crime and vandalism, sexual harassment, gangs and threats to personal safety.

Boys also highlighted the riskiness of their neighbourhood. Harry, Gary and Jack (Focus Group 11), for instance, described Speke as comprising of a shopping precinct which was 'not a particularly nice place to walk' due to large groups congregating and as a place they avoided at night-time on account of the presence of large numbers of youths drinking alcohol. However, reflecting the interaction of class with cultural understandings of masculinity, the boys often played down these risks. Though noting that he felt uneasy in the shopping precinct Jack went on to describe it as 'not dangerous' and Harry, discussing parts of the estate with a reputation for being 'quite rough', added that the area was 'not like as bad as other places that I know of'. Similarly, despite being amongst the most deprived areas in England these boys described their immediate neighbourhoods as 'quiet' and as 'quite safe'. In these accounts experiences and understandings of risk were patterned by class position, although there was some variation according to gender.

The risk narratives produced by working-class youths from black or minority ethnic backgrounds were also patterned by class and neighbourhood. However, as I have discussed in Chapter Seven, these understandings and experiences of risk were also bound up with ethnicity. Risk was defined almost exclusively in terms of racial abuse, assault or discrimination. Nevertheless, a similar emphasis was accorded to their

respective neighbourhoods being rough or deprived. Young women (Focus Group 16), for instance, referred to the widespread carrying of knives by both black and white young men in the Princes Park neighbourhood (also constructing this risk practice in gendered terms as I noted in Chapter Seven). For the men, risk practices were associated with 'harassment' by teachers and, especially, police. Hence, they recalled occasions of having bags searched by teachers and numerous incidents where they had been stopped by police and accused of various misdemeanours. Such experiences and understandings of risk were racialised; but they also reflected clearly their class location - knife crime, possession of drugs, burglaries and stealing cars, all of which the men claimed to have been accused of, routinely being associated with the materiality of everyday life in deprived working-class areas such as Princes Park.

References to neighbourhood spaces suffering high levels of deprivation were often accompanied by an expressed sense of having nothing to do and frustration at routine encounters with police or community police officers. This understanding of neighbourhood space often transcended gender and ethnicity. In the group of young, white working-class women, Sara (Focus Group 6) complained bitterly of there being 'nothing to do' in Walton. This was augmented by Gemma who asserted that in Walton there was '... not one place, there's not one community club, not one disco, not one!' and Katrina's observation that the only venues for young people provided structured activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award which were of little appeal to her and her friends. Their rejection of more formal activities led them to spend much time socialising on the street or in parks, activities which often led to their being

moved on by police or community officers, a practice which the women strongly resented.

Young men (Focus Group 16) from black or minority ethnic backgrounds also posited their neighbourhood as bereft of places for young people to go to. This was associated with high levels of deprivation and a lack of local urban regeneration. Hasan, Nwankwo and Fadil in particular bemoaned the fact that Granby Street, for many years the beating heart of Liverpool's black community, had been turned into a 'ghost town' with a concomitant 'loss of community'. For example:

Focus Group 16:

Nwankwo: ... you used to like see other people and all that like and now you just walk and there's no-one [...] Yeah. It was lively and that, a bit like, you'd see some action and that and now you go in and now it's just [shrugs shoulders]

[...]

Dwight: Like when you left, years ago yeah you used to be able to go out and you'd be like - you wouldn't even have to ring your mates to go 'oh where are you?' [...] just walk down the road and you would see someone 'oh alright' [...] But now it's like dead.

As with other young working-class men, such narratives were refracted through a gendered lens, Dwight, Nwankwo and Fadil suggesting that Toxteth was 'not actually that bad'. But the sense of their neighbourhood as having a strong association with crime and a lack of places to go or things to do on account of its deprived status was writ large throughout their narrative. Many working-class youths thus discussed risk in terms accordant with both the materiality of their local environ and with culturally

related understandings of risk informed by material and discursive aspects of class position.

However, not all of these young working-class people discussed risks in the same terms and there were some variations reflecting different interactions of class with age, gender and ethnicity and different experiences of socialisation. This was especially so in respect of risky practices understood as entailing some potential for personal harm. For example, several young women asserted that they either did not or only very rarely drank alcohol. Jayne (Focus Group 6) noted she was 'not really into alcohol' and Suzanne stated that although she did drink she did not get 'totally wasted or anything, just slightly drunk'. Likewise, Carla (Focus Group 12) said she neither smoked nor drunk alcohol and while the boys (Focus Group 11) expressed knowledge of the extent of a range of risk practices in Speke, all likewise claimed not to drink or to be involved with street-based groups. Rather, in these accounts the focus often lay with relatively benign risk practices relating to road safety, hanging out with friends in each others' homes playing video games, messing around or playing football or riding bikes on the local playing field. Yet, even in these narratives there was a clear recognition that such risk practices were a significant aspect of their respective social and cultural milieu.

Working-class risk narratives were patterned in terms of both the forms of practices understood as risky and how these were associated with certain neighbourhood spaces. Variations according to multifarious interactions of class with other positions and experiences of socialisation aside, these young people saw practices such as alcohol, drug-use and fighting as *normal* aspects of their social and cultural milieu. In

this respect, risk narratives were informed by the materiality of everyday life and their culturally related risk discourses in ways that produced understandings of risk that ran counter to problematising governmental youth risk discourses. That is to say, such practices were not considered as being especially risky; rather they were simply taken-for-granted aspects of their everyday lives.

'It's only in Allerton, it's not like a ghetto or anything': Middle-class Youth and Risk

Middle-class focus groups comprised young people living in Aigburth, Allerton, Childwall, or Mossley Hill. As I observed in Chapter Three, these areas have relatively low levels of multiple deprivation, experiencing fewer social problems than many other parts of Liverpool. Hence, these young people lived in areas and had social backgrounds generally constructed as relatively non-problematic by governmental risk discourses.

To a large degree this was borne out in focused discussions. In developing their respective risk narratives, middle-class participants tended to be more eloquent and confident in detailing accounts of their respective everyday lives. Experiences and understandings of risk were found to be informed not only by different material conditions vis-à-vis working-class youth, but also by greater knowledge of the rules of the game as regards focused discussion (Silva and Wright, 2005). In particular, where working-class youths tended to construct risk as practices associated with the potential to cause personal harm, middle-class youths were more inclined to draw on

interpretative repertoires which understand risk as external threat. Where active engagement in practices defined as risk by these young people was discussed, the focus typically rested on relatively benign activities. As with the working-class youths, however, risk narratives were characterised by some ambiguity according to specific interactions of class with other axes of identity.

Albeit with some exceptions, boys (Focus Group 8), young men (Focus Group 9) and women (Focus Group 10) said remarkably little about practices relating to alcohol consumption, drug-use or engagement in the city's night-time economy. These absences not only concerned their own risk practices, but also related to their social and cultural milieu more generally. The inference of this was that experiences of such risk practices did not constitute a significant aspect of their respective everyday lives.

This was evidenced by the sorts of practices understood as being everyday risks. Middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) focused largely on risks associated with getting into trouble at school and leisure practices such as playing football and riding bikes in a nearby park. Many of the young middle-class men (Focus Group 9) similarly referred to school-related risks such as truancy and not doing homework. Young women (Focus Group 10) also said little of note with respect to active participation in problematised youth risk practices, focusing instead on cultural activities such as 'dancing', 'going to the cinema', 'going to friends' houses' or 'staying in with parents'.

Many of these young people often struggled to identify everyday practices considered risky and much of their discussion related to issues less visible in problematising youth risk discourses. Of particular note in this respect was the young women's

discussion of the infraction of school rules such as leaving the school at lunchtime without signing out, which held the risk of potential disciplinary action. Annemarie and Dawn's initial formulation of this was accompanied by considerable embarrassed laughter, the inference being that neither regarded this as a legitimate risk practice to discuss. Yet, this example generated further discussion of similar practices including leaving school during breaks or free periods without permission, being 'told off' by teachers for not signing out of school during free periods and the potential worry caused to others in the event of involvement in an accident while unofficially off the school premises. These discussions were largely informed by gender and age, the women protesting that such rules were unnecessary as they were now adults. At the same time, however, the emphasis accorded to such risks, taken together with the conspicuous absence of discussion of participation in problematised youth risk practices, was indicative of class position. In this respect, the women went to considerable lengths to present themselves as risk-averse, simultaneously disidentifying with problematised youth risks. The most extreme formulation of this was evident in Georgina's summary of her social life:

Focus Group 10:

Georgina: I go bell ringing Tuesday, Wednesday, occasionally Friday occasionally Saturday and Sunday [laughs]. That is my life! [laughs] and then when I am not bell ringing on Friday I go horse riding or go out.

In contrast to working-class youth, the middle-class risk narratives were characterised by a much greater emphasis on risks understood as a form of external threat. The boys (Focus Group 8) constructed this in terms of threats posed by other, especially

working-class, boys. Such threats were associated with specific spaces, particularly a nearby park and the Jumps where, as I discussed in Chapter Five, these boys often felt intimidated by working-class 'scallies'. The young, middle-class men (Focus Group 9) similarly focused primarily on threats of violence posed by other young men, again associating such risks with *working-class* youths. Owen, for example, referred to an incident when 'a gang of lads' had burst a football he had been playing with using a knife, Sean discussed having been chased around the city-centre by 'a gang of lads', one of whom was brandishing a knife, and Nathan spoke of having witnessed a 'gang who set fire to a wheelie-bin'. This risk narrative also illustrated how class interacts with gender, most of these young men playing down the significance of such threats and laying claim to being able to look after themselves in a manner evocative of a tough, masculinity more traditionally associated with working-class men (see Chapter Six). This interaction of class with gender was also evident in the risk narrative produced by the young women (Focus Group 10) who, while also defining risk in terms of external threat, associated this invariably with young men as I elaborated in Chapter Five.

The association of risk with threats posed by working-class youth was strengthened by attempts to present their own middle-class neighbourhoods as safe. This was expressed most clearly in the narrative produced by the young, middle-class men (Focus Group 9). Jonathon and Sam juxtaposed their own affluent neighbourhoods with economically deprived areas of Liverpool which they associated with the prevalence of gangs and racial violence:

Focus Group 9:

Jonathon: [...] I live in Grassendale which is quite a decent area but if you, you know a few strides over to Garston, that's where you don't want to live, especially if you are of a culture and erm you always see gangs

Sam: yeah

Jonathon: like picking on the black people.

Similarly, in talking of the extent of threats posed by other youths in his neighbourhood, Owen maintained that: 'it's only in Allerton, it's not like a ghetto or anything like that [laughs]'. The inference in these narratives was clear: risk practices relating to gangs and violence were understood as relatively absent in the more affluent, middle-class, suburbs of Liverpool, but more typical of working-class areas and, therefore, more common amongst working-class youth.

These constructions of other, working-class youths as posing risks were strengthened by accounts of their own risk practices. Where problematised youth practices were discussed then emphasis lay with their general abstinence. This was especially evident in the risk narrative produced by the young women (Focus Group 10).

Gemma stated that 'I don't even drink' and Georgina that 'I never go to town of a night and I wouldn't want to'. Indeed, summarising the group's position regarding alcohol consumption, Kiera asserted that 'I don't think anyone here's that sort of person'. By contrast, other young people's drinking practices were routinely condemned: Jenny claiming that excessive drinking was 'a waste of time' and 'silly', and Gemma and Kiera co-producing a narrative through which other people's drinking behaviour was roundly condemned:

Focus Group 10:

Gemma: Many people don't know when to stop drinking either, like some of my friends don't know when to stop drinking

Kiera: Some people just go out just solely to get drunk, that is their aim of a night whereas me, I'm just like enjoy yourselves and just like have a good time with your mates

Gemma: Yeah

Kiera: And some people go 'right, I'm goin' to drink this much tonight and I'm gonna get completely bladdered, I'm not gonna be able to remember what's gonna go off, what's going on whatever.'

This narrative was clearly informed by the women's culturally meaningful understandings of respectable, *middle-class* femininity (Skeggs, 1997). Their narrative both asserted an abstinence from drinking, reflecting the specific material conditions of their everyday lives, and conveyed a strong moral condemnation of young drinkers. In this respect, their narrative worked to distance them from problematised representations of working-class youth which typify dominant governmental risk discourses.

Many of these young middle-class people hence experienced and understood risk differently from working-class youth. Nevertheless, other examples suggested a much more ambiguous relation between class and risk. To exemplify, as discussed in Chapters Five and Six respectively, some middle-class women (Focus Group 4) talked extensively about active engagement in risk-practices relating to night-time leisure and alcohol consumption, while amongst the men, Jonathon (Focus Group 5) spoke of fighting with other men in his neighbourhood. This dissonance was perhaps attributable to the fact that these young people lived in other, slightly less affluent

parts of Liverpool, or mixed in social groups where such practices were more commonplace.

In addition, the middle-class groups discussed above also contained dissonant cases. Amongst the boys (Focus Group 8), Daniel spoke of 'stealing a can of Red Bull' from a local sweetshop while Alex, who was positioned by the other boys as a 'Scallie' (a label he variously identified with and resisted), referred to taking part in football-related violence and fighting with boys from other schools. Likewise, amongst the men (Focus Group 9) Sean referred to regularly consuming alcohol and Sam acknowledged that he often hung around in a gang, albeit one constructed as being relatively benign and non-threatening:

Focus Group 9:

Sam: [...] I live round here [Aigburth] but like if I go out I will go out in a gang but like we won't go up to no one or like say nothing to no one but like people, cos we go round in a gang and like say if you wear trackies then they just think you are scum-bags.

In this extract, Sam's reference to hanging around in gangs and wearing a tracksuit worked to position him as a member of a problematised youth population. However, this is a positioning he resisted, his assertion that his 'gang' do not try to intimidate people and that he is not a 'scum-bag' reproducing a boundary between himself and the image of the risky, working-class youth mobilised by dominant youth risk discourses.

Despite the presence of some dissonant practices, middle-class youths' risk

narratives were largely patterned in that there was an over-riding tendency to construct risk, not as practice actively engaged in, but as threats posed by other, especially working-class, youths. Where some form of risk-taking was acknowledged then the focus typically lay with more benign activities vis-à-vis their working-class counterparts. Importantly, this suggests that social class continues to inform experiences and understandings of particular youth cultural practices.

'Garston, that's where you don't want to live': Risk and Class Distinctions

Risk practices were frequently mobilised as forms of symbolic capital through which class-based distinctions were expressed and reproduced. Narratives were found to enact a symbolic violence whereby certain working-class youth were positioned as inferior on account of engaging in the *wrong* risk practices or as making the *wrong* judgements of taste in respect of these.

While identifying with a range of youth risk practices several working-class youths simultaneously disidentified from pathological constructions of working-class youth (Skeggs, 1997). As I noted above, while boys living in Speke (Focus Group 11) constructed their neighbourhood as risky, they nonetheless played down these risks by claiming the estate to be 'not that bad'. At the same time, they made clear distinctions between their own neighbourhood and other areas 'towards like the Halewood side [...] where, y'know get like all, 'I'm the hard boy' attitude'. Constructing the Speke estate in such terms, the boys did important identity work, mobilising specific moral judgements of risk through which they reproduced points of

demarcation between themselves as respectable risk-avoiding working-class boys and problematised youth associated with gangs and aggressive behaviour in other working-class areas. This was also powerful in their discussion of alcohol and drug-use which they associated with 'the wrong crowd'.

Working-class females likewise problematised young working-class males.

Discussing experiences of sexual harassment when walking around the Speke estate, Julie and Jackie (Focus Group 12) described some young men as 'just like dirty' as they 'come up to you and ask you dirty questions'. Similarly, working-class males were associated with 'gangs' who the women blamed for making excessive noise and for engaging in acts of vandalism. Similar judgements of other working-class youth were evident in Ashlea and Gemma's (Focus Group 6) account of drug-use. As I noted in Chapter Five, both acknowledged having experimented with drugs: yet, throughout their discussion drug-users were roundly condemned, the language of class again being in evidence. Referring to having had her drink spiked with ecstasy, Ashlea asserted she no longer wanted anything to do with 'druggies' and both she and Gemma were especially disdainful towards people who spend 'like three hundred quid a week on beef' [cocaine], who 'don't have jobs' and who fund their habit by 'taking money off their mum or by stealing cars and selling them'. In this account, drug-use was not only associated with certain sections of the working-class, namely the unemployed, but also with those who commit crimes to fund their habit. Indeed, these accounts of drug-users and dealers evoked the images of such risky youth mobilised by governmental discourses as manifest in news media as well as public health campaigns such as the FRANK cocaine advert (see Chapter Three). Again the effect was to mobilise drug-use and drug-users as symbolic markers of class-based

distinctions, the women distinguishing themselves from denigrated members of the working-class. In this respect, the women, somewhat ambiguously, identified with a range of risk-taking behaviours while simultaneously positioning themselves as more respectable and morally superior vis-à-vis problematised working-class youth.

Risk-narratives generated by those with working-class, black or minority ethnic backgrounds also problematised certain working-class youth, the language of class being even more explicit. Here, however, positioning related to their broader association of risk with racism. The men (Focus Group 15) for example, both utilised short-cuts which stand-in for working-class, describing the Mudmen from Garston as 'chavs' who wear 'trackies', and associated racism with white, *working-class* areas of Liverpool. The women (Focus Group 16) also associated racism with white, working-class people. Speaking of Ruksana's relationship with her white boyfriend, Anila noted that his family 'was OK with her', this attitude being attributed to their living in Aigburth (a middle-class area). However, she also declared that had they lived in Huyton or Speke (working-class areas) then she would have experienced considerable more difficulty. The implicit assumption here was that racism was especially prominent in white working-class areas. This was made more explicit in a later discussion about racial abuse and prejudice where a clear association of racism with class position was made:

Focus Group 16:

Sharnaz: [...] they're the people who haven't even got a good job anyway.

Raima: they're, they're on the dole and stuff

- Sharnaz: they're not the people who, who are so educated and who, y'know they pay taxes, they're not the people
- Dave: Yeah?
- Sharnaz: the people who would just got simple jobs, maybe at the most erm y'know erm as a typist or something, but nothing with a career or anything that helps with the economy themselves.

In this account, the women associated the racist views of some white working-class people with an assumed low economic status and lack of education. As the narrative unfolded this was contrasted with their own social standing: the women positioning themselves as respectable, morally superior, black or minority ethnic working-class individuals by asserting that their families were hard-working tax-payers. As another member of this group, Ruksana, put it: 'my mum and dad both work [...] they're both good members of society.'

If these young working-class youths showed a proclivity for problematising certain sections of working-class youth and for disidentifying with pathologised representations of working-class youth more generally, then this tendency was even more prominent in the middle-class risk narratives. These risk narratives were refracted through the lens of class, judgements of taste in respect of certain youth risk practices being mobilised as markers of distinction between respectable middle-class and less respectable working-class and enacting a symbolic violence through which working-class youth, especially young men, were denigrated.

For example, drawing on broader governmental discourses which demonise sections of the working-class through an emphasis on poor parenting, Gemma and Kiera

(Focus Group 10) attributed excessive alcohol consumption to 'parental influence' or 'problems at home'. Several young, middle-class men were more critical of working-class youth, focusing on those engaging in violence generally and racist violence in particular. Speaking of gangs, Nathan, Owen, Jonathon and Sam (Focus Group 9) asserted that this was not an issue in their neighbourhoods which were constructed as being 'quite posh'. This was juxtaposed with more deprived, working-class, areas. Mark, who lived in an especially affluent Liverpool suburb, routinely associated Speke with working-class youths who wore 'hoodies' and 'trackies', had 'really scouse accents', used 'swear words' and were 'ignorant' of 'other cultures' and 'politics'. Jonathon likewise described Garston as an area where 'there's a lot of gangs', which was 'going down in the property values' and as 'a place where you don't want to live.' These narratives entailed a clear moral positioning: not only were working-class areas associated with gangs and racism, there was also an expressed association of working-class youth with a lack of intelligence. This was evident in Jonathon's response to my observation that the Mudmen had their own website to which he commented: 'they definitely most probably have once one of them finds out, which figures out how to use a computer!' These men thus drew a clear distinction between themselves as respectable, non-violent middle-class youths and more violent, racist and unintelligent working-class youth.

Middle-class boys (Focus Group 8) also associated certain risky practices with working-class youth. In addition to Simon's reference to feeling threatened by the presence of 'gangs of scallies' when riding his bike on 'the Jumps', Thomas discussed an incident at a church-run youth club where a 'scallie' had turned up looking for a fight with another boy, and John spoke of his unease when walking

through Anfield, a distinctly working-class area, after having played in a school rugby match. Much of their focus lay with assaults perpetrated by boys from a school situated in a working-class area with who they shared a bus route. This included references to these other boys throwing missiles or spitting at boys from their own school, conflagrations at bus-stops and boys getting off buses and 'just battering people.' None of these was described as having directly involved the boys themselves, yet the threat posed by working-class boys was clearly part of how risk was understood. Again then the tendency was to enact a symbolic violence, male working-class youth being interactively positioned as a risk population to be feared and avoided.

The process of reproducing class-based distinctions by denigrating working-class youth and their risk practices was complemented by the expression of shared understandings of clothes as symbolising a particular deviant status (Cohen, S., 1972). In particular, in narratives of gangs or violent youth certain clothes were used to problematise working-class youth and to reaffirm moral, class-based, boundaries. In discussing 'little scallies' hanging around on the streets, Gemma and Georgina (Focus Group 10) drew attention to their wearing of 'Lowe Alpine hats' and 'scarves that cover half their faces'; such youths being described as 'ridiculous' and 'a bunch of pillocks'. Likewise, Mark and Jonathon (Focus Group 9) referred to feeling more threatened by 'lads who wear hoodies, trackies', brands such as 'Lacoste' and 'Lowe Alpine', or clothes from 'JD' [Sports] and 'Sports Soccer'. Indeed, Jonathon did important identity work in respect of class in discussing his change in fashion sense since leaving a previous school:

Focus Group 9:

Jonathon: [...] I used to be a scum bag, I never used to be a bad scum bag but y'know I used to dress like awfully, Lacoste trackies and stuff like that and once me mum got me out that school and I started going out with different people and put me in a posh school, became different, started wearing jeans, combats - took me a few years to get a good sense of style but you know we are there at the end.

Here, clear associations were made between certain clothes and risky, working-class, youth; Jonathon repositioning himself as a more respectable, middle-class man due to him no longer wearing sportswear. Such associations of certain clothes with deviant working-class youth were in this sense, indicative of Holt and Griffin's (2005:246) observation that class inequalities are constituted, justified, naturalised and reproduced not only at a material level, but also through discourses which construct working-class people as 'less intelligent and less refined'.

These observations notwithstanding, both working- and middle-class risk narratives contained some ambiguities, often blurring class-based distinctions. Some working-class youths spoke of *avoiding* active engagement in youth risk practices relating to alcohol, drugs and street-based groups (Focus Groups 11 and 12) in ways that aligned them more closely with middle-class sensibilities. Likewise, some middle-class males referred to taking part in practices such as shoplifting and fighting (Focus Group 8) or drinking and hanging around in gangs (Focus Group 9) in a manner expressive of a more authentic working-class masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007). Such accounts reflected the different relationships between individual participants and their respective local social context,

as well as different material experiences and understandings of risk. Nonetheless, the mobilisation of certain risk practices as indicators of class identity and distinction remained a powerful theme to emerge from these risk narratives.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have illustrated how young people's risk narratives were found to be informed by class and neighbourhood in significant ways. In terms of their materiality, many youth risks were experienced quite differently: working-class youths were more likely to identify with or acknowledge the presence in their neighbourhoods of problematised risk practices such as street-based alcohol consumption, drug-use and gang-related behaviours. By contrast, middle-class youths often found it difficult to identify aspects of their everyday lives as risky and were more inclined to construct risk as forms of external threat: this 'threat' was itself understood as emanating from working-class youths. In terms of material experiences and understandings of risk, my investigation, therefore, supports current youth studies research which attests to the continued importance of class and the local social and cultural context which young people inhabit in informing many youth cultural practices (France, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008; Thomson, 2011).

However, the continued relevancy of class is no simple matter of young people encountering or experiencing material risks in different ways. Investigating the experiences and understandings of risk identified by young people occupying different class positions and inhabiting different neighbourhood spaces also allowed me to

access varying culturally related discourses of class and risk. These discourses further exemplify the continued salience of class. Both working-class and middle-class youths understood certain risk practices as forms of symbolic capital which mark class distinctions. This was evident in both the association of certain practices with other, working-class youth and the use of the language of class (Skeggs, 1997; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Lawler, 2005; Kelhily and Pattman, 2006) to position working-class youths in particular, often denigrated, terms. Working-class youths often positioned themselves as *respectable*, either by disidentifying with pathological representations of working-class youth more generally, or through the condemnation of other, *non-respectable*, youth with whom they associated problematised risk practices. This process of expressing class-based distinctions was, however, most noticeable in middle-class narratives. The routine use of terms such as 'scallies', 'hoodies', 'gangs' and so forth enacted a symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984), operating to position working-class neighbourhoods as inferior and working-class risk practices as tasteless, vulgar and more risky. In doing so, working-class youths were positioned as more risky, less intelligent and lacking in respectability while middle-class youths simultaneously reflexively positioned themselves as morally and intellectually superior (Skeggs, 2004; Lawler, 2005b; Kelhily and Pattman, 2006). There was, therefore, a clear sense in which risk practices were used to express and reproduce class distinctions. Class, therefore, was found to matter, not only in terms of the materiality of risks, but also in how young people's own localised risk and class discourses informed identity work in important ways.

Risk narratives did exhibit some variance. Reflecting specific interactions of class with other social positions, different material contexts and diverse experiences of

socialisation, some individuals spoke of risks in terms that were somewhat at odds with their group as a whole. This resulted in class boundaries occasionally appearing to be blurred. For instance, a small number of middle-class males spoke of active engagement in risk practices more typically associated with a working-class masculinity (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007) as I discussed in Chapter Six. Similarly, amongst females, the working- and middle-class groups often spoke of risks in ways that were cut across by similar culturally and socially embedded understandings of gender (see Chapter Five). Further, while young people living in socially deprived parts of Liverpool referred to similar focal concerns, as I elaborated in the previous chapter, the ways in which these were understood and used to mark identity distinctions varied according to ethnicity. Nonetheless, even in these narratives class remained a powerful informant of experiences and understandings of risk.

My investigation, therefore, lends further support to current youth studies research by showing how both young people's experiences and understandings of risk, and their understandings of class identities, were clearly informed in particular ways according to the different material, social and cultural contexts in which they live (Henderson et al., 2007).

Introduction

In conditions of uncertainty and instability which are associated with late modernity and the risk society (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), young people and their practices have become perpetual sources of anxiety. Numerous governmental risk discourses construct young people as being at risk of making poor transitions into adulthood, or as members of a risk population who threaten themselves or society more generally on account of their engagement in a range of risky practices. Young people are now constantly under surveillance and their practices give rise to a regular supply of 'daily moral panics' which present young people in largely negative ways (Henderson et al., 2007:60).

However, how young people experience and understand risk, and how they respond to dominant governmental risk discourses, is shaped by the different local social networks that they belong to and the various material, social, cultural and discursive resources to which they have access (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003; Bunton, Green and Mitchell, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007). This is borne out in my research into young people living in Liverpool. This shows that young people's experiences of risk were shaped by class and neighbourhood location as well as by different age, gender and ethnic positions and multifarious interactions of these. Understanding and experiences of the risk were also seen to inform processes of identity work. Risks were often used in relational ways as, in the course of focus group discussions,

individuals reflexively and interactively positioned themselves and others (Davies and Harré, 1990) in a range of identity positions and used risks as forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) by which to express and reproduce different social distinctions. Experiences and understandings of risk were, in other words, found to be closely bound up with identities. In this final chapter, I summarise these main points. I show how my work contributes to current research into youth, risk and identity at the beginning of the 21st century and consider some of the wider implications of my investigation, both for future research and for questions of social policy.

Liverpool Youth, Everyday Risks and Social Position

Socio-economic and cultural changes of the last thirty to forty years have had a profound impact upon Liverpool's demographic make-up. Many traditional working-class occupations have either disappeared or are in decline, while there has been a considerable expansion in retail and service industries. Recent financial investment and the development of a vibrant leisure economy have led to the city being, in many respects, a more affluent place than it had been for many decades. Yet, in terms of general socio-economic indicators and overall Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking, Liverpool remains a somewhat risky and uncertain city for young people to live in (Office for National Statistics, 2001; 2005; Parkinson et al., 2005; City of Liverpool, 2007; 2009a). This is especially so in respect of the materiality of practices constructed as risky through governmental youth risk discourses. Liverpool has relatively high levels of recorded crime and anti-social behaviour (Liverpool City Council, 2008) while drug-use, alcohol consumption and related hospital admissions

are commonplace (Anderson et al., 2007; Deacon et al., 2008; Liverpool City Council, 2008).

Such risks are not, however, distributed evenly across the city's youth population. As I illustrated in Chapter Three using available official statistics and data generated from interviews with various professionals, they are more typically associated with those socially deprived, that is, working-class, neighbourhoods. These practices are also linked with age, gender and ethnicity: statistically, young, white men are more likely to be either offender or victim of crime or to be involved in anti-social behaviour (Liverpool City Council, 2008) and are more prone to be involved in alcohol-related violence or be admitted to hospital with alcohol-related injuries (Deacon et al., 2008; Anderson et al., 2007). Young women, by contrast, drink more frequently than men and are more likely to experience sexual assault or abuse (Anderson et al., 2007). Reflecting the city's long and deeply embedded history of racism, black or minority ethnic youth remain more susceptible to racially motivated assault or violence (Liverpool City Council, 2008). In other words, the material reality of those practices constructed as risky through dominant youth risk discourses is related in a range of ways to the different local and social positions that young people inhabit.

Such risks were certainly present in the narratives produced by the young people in my research. However, other practices also featured prominently in some of the narratives: for instance, infractions of school rules, hanging around in public spaces, hazards relating to the workplace, acts of daring-do and so forth. Importantly, the practices that the young people defined as risky, and how these were experienced and understood, were informed by a range of social and cultural factors. In particular,

experiences and understandings of risk were related to the different localities in which the young people live and the various related material, cultural and symbolic resources that help shape their opinions, values and identities (Henderson et al., 2007). This included the different localised culturally embedded risk discourses (Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004; Crawshaw, 2004) and interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998, 1999; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001) that young people draw upon in making sense of risks *and* social identities. These various influences were evident in how risk narratives were patterned according to the age, gender, ethnic and class and neighbourhood characteristics of each group.

Risk narratives were clearly patterned according to neighbourhood and class location. Those from NS-SEG 4-5 backgrounds living in the more deprived parts of Liverpool (as defined by Index of Multiple Deprivation ranking) tended to represent risk practices such as alcohol consumption, drug-use and threats of violence or abuse as common features of their everyday lives. Several spoke at length

Ashlea: white, working-class woman aged 16

Living in Walton, a socially deprived part of Liverpool, Ashlea presented as something of a classic teenage tearaway. Providing a vivid and candid account of her everyday life, Ashlea claimed to routinely sneak out from home of an evening to go drinking with friends and spoke of numerous experiences of getting drunk, having drinks spiked and smoking cannabis. Such practices had, on occasions, resulted in her having unprotected sex, being hospitalised and, at least on two separate occasions, being sexually assaulted. Few in Ashlea's group spoke of engaging in these types of risky practices to the same extent. Yet, they all recalled anecdotes of friends who had shared similar experiences. In this sense, all were acutely aware of, even concerned about, a range of youth risks. Regarding alcohol consumption, this led Ashlea to ask rhetorically: *'Why do we do it? It's not even like it's really funny.'*

Nonetheless, this awareness did not necessarily translate into risk avoidance or management strategies and while Ashlea's narrative stood out, it indicated that such risks were not atypical of the everyday lives of young, working-class women.

about their own engagement in such practices. But even for those who did not, these were still viewed as forming part of the back-cloth to their everyday lives. Resisting dominant constructions of youth risks and risky youths, however, the riskiness of their neighbourhoods was typically played down by these working-class youths, claims to be familiar with other risky youths and with their localities more generally underpinning a profound sense of feeling safe within their cultural milieu.

By contrast, risk-narratives generated by those from NS-SEG 1-3 who lived in more affluent parts of the city tended to express different experiences and understandings of risk. Many of these middle-class youths spoke of engagement in practices such as alcohol consumption or of conflicts with other young people. Yet, the tendency was to emphasise their capacity for avoiding or managing these practices. Further, risks associated with threats of abuse or violent assault were typically associated with other, working-class, neighbourhoods; their own middle-class neighbourhoods being constructed as safe on the grounds that such risks were largely absent. In this respect, therefore, experiences and understandings of risk were found to be strongly patterned according to class and neighbourhood location.

Understandings of risk were also informed by age, gender, ethnicity and various interactions of these locations. Regarding age, for instance, the 14-15 year-olds tended to represent themselves as *not* engaging in risk practices such as excessive drinking or drug-use: this was expressed either by overtly distancing themselves from such practices, or by absences in their narratives. Rather, for these younger people, discussion focused on practices such as socialising in friends' houses, hanging around on streets or playing fields, or going shopping with friends or family. Those

aged 16-19 were more inclined to talk of alcohol consumption and the frequenting of risky spaces, such as private parties and night-clubs, which they associated with confrontations with other young people, drug-use and the spiking of drinks. By contrast, 19-24 year-olds asserted a preference for having quiet nights in at home or

Georgina: white, middle-class woman aged 17

Georgina, who lived in the relatively affluent suburb of Mossley Hill, typically struggled to identify aspects of her everyday life as risky. Like many other middle-class women, Georgina stated that she rarely socialised in the city centre or went out drinking. Rather, she noted that much of her social life was taken up with practices such as bell-ringing twice a week at her local church, going to the cinema, visiting friends or staying in with parents. Indeed, the only activities she regarded to be potentially risky were not tidying her bedroom or getting into trouble for leaving school during free periods without signing out.

Much of her narrative was characterised by a degree of embarrassment, often accompanied by attempts to present herself in favourable terms. Laughing at the very absence of risky practices in her account, she asserted that: *'I'm not a complete freak, I do go to the cinema and that. You know, I am quite normal!'*

Both Georgina's embarrassment and her desire to appear 'normal' reflected the influence of culturally embedded risk discourses. These construct certain risky practices as common features of young people's lifestyles, countering dominant governmental youth risk discourses. This tension between being an unproblematic, non-risky youth and a 'normal' youth was clearly evident throughout Georgina's narrative.

for going to local pubs with friends and/or partners. Indeed, these young adults routinely associated risk with threats and hazards relating to their respective workplaces, underlining the patterning of risk according to age. The lines of demarcation between different age cohorts were, as one might expect, at times blurred: yet, broad patterns of practice were clearly evident.

Gender was also found to inform experiences and understandings of risk. Both males and females drew extensively on an interpretative repertoire which understands risk as

some form of external threat or hazard. In particular, risks were often referred to in terms of past experiences or future possibilities of conflict with other young people. However, such risks were understood through a gendered lens and while males generally spoke of physical confrontations with other males, females focused on

threats relating to sexual harassment or assault. Expressed responses to such risks were also patterned, reflecting culturally informed understandings of risk and gender: males more typically spoke of their ability to look after themselves, females of their propensity to use reciprocal risk avoidance strategies such as looking after one another when out drinking.

Risk narratives also correlated to ethnicity. Young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds defined risk almost exclusively in terms of racism, numerous references being made to actual incidents or expectations of racial harassment and

Dwight: Black, working-class man aged 18

Dwight lived in Princes Park, an inner-city area with high levels of deprivation and a large non-white population. Dwight associated risk almost exclusively with racism. Examples of such risks included: getting stopped by police and accused of being '*equipped to steal*', harassment by teachers who '*just see us as trouble-makers*' and incidents of abuse from white youths. A physically imposing young man who presented as quite a tough and athletic individual, Dwight also referred to having been involved in several fights with white youths, including an incident involving the Mudmen, a well-known racist gang from Garston.

For Dwight, such risks were simply part and parcel of everyday life and were often translated into a profound sense of feeling 'out of place' in much of Liverpool, exemplified by his claim that: '*the only place I feel safe in is Toxteth*'.

Such sentiments were shared by all of the young people from black or minority ethnic backgrounds, underlining the extent to which risk and ethnicity were related. This relation clearly operated at both the material level, evident in the day-to-day reality of racism, and discursively in that it informed a sense of ethnic belonging and marked a distinction from a white Liverpool identity.

general feelings of being 'out of place' in parts of Liverpool. White youths, by contrast, said little of risks that could be construed in these racialised terms.

These narratives were further patterned inasmuch as practices such as alcohol consumption and drug-use were conspicuous by their absence in the accounts produced by black or minority ethnic youth. For their part, white youths tended to focus on a much broader array of risk practices

associated with their everyday lives.

Broadly speaking, understandings and experiences of risk were strongly patterned according to age, gender, ethnicity and class and neighbourhood. Yet, it would be a gross over-simplification to claim that any single position unilaterally informed risk narratives. Patterns of risk practice were nuanced by the interactions of different social positions. Narratives produced by males were clearly unified by an emphasis on practices associated with culturally approved forms of acceptable masculinity (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002): yet, the specific forms that these took varied according to age, class and neighbourhood and ethnicity. Females likewise spoke of a broad array of risks depending on different configurations of age, class and ethnicity; though again, narratives cohered around a strong sense of being able to manage or avoid risks in ways invocative of a relatively conventional, feminine respectability (Skeggs, 1997).

Risk narratives were further nuanced by interactions of ethnicity with age and gender. For instance, the 14-15 year-old girls from black or minority ethnic backgrounds generally struggled to identify aspects of their everyday lives as being risky, their emphasis lying primarily with domestic activities such as helping parents with cooking or going shopping with friends or family. The 16-18 year-old women, on the other hand, spoke extensively of the anticipation of being racially abused, though references to actual incidents of racism were rare. A similar pattern was evident in the 14-15 year-old boys' risk narrative: references to racism dominated their discussion, but again to a far lesser extent than the risk narratives produced by 16-18 year-old men who spoke extensively about actual conflicts with white youths or confrontations

with authority figures. In these instances, while risk was associated with racism, the manner in which this was experienced and understood was found to vary according to interactions of ethnicity with other social positions.

My research, hence, captures something of the complexity of the relationship between young people and risk. Risk is very much a part of the everyday lives of young people living in Liverpool. Yet, how these young people responded to dominant governmental discourses and media representations which construct them as members of a risk population, and how they understood and experienced risks, were very much informed by the social and local spaces that they inhabited in the context of their everyday lives.

Risk, Identity and Distinctions

The above observations relate to a further point; namely, that experiences and understandings of risk were found to be complexly interwoven with identity in a range of important ways. Recent years have, of course, seen considerable interest in the relationships between youth, risk and identity (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; Mitchell, Bunton and Green, 2004). Most notably, several writers working collectively as part of the *Inventing Adulthoods* research project (Thomson et al., 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Kelhily, 2007; Robb, 2007; Thomson, 2011) have charted the role that risks play in the process of becoming adult. The primary focus in this research lies with risks with the potential to encumber youth-to-adult transitions, such as, for example, educational choices, employment and training, relationships and

health and wellbeing. However, consideration is also given to many of the risk practices that were raised by the young people in my study, such as violent crime, alcohol and drug-use. For these researchers, young people's experiences of such risks, their attitudes towards them, and their capacity for managing or overcoming them, are very much informed by the different material, social, cultural and symbolic resources that are available according to each individual's locality and the specific intersections of class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Understandings and experiences of risk are, in this sense, very much bound up with social identity and locality. My research findings contribute to this, and while I adopted a different, though complimentary, approach, the data produced through my focus groups likewise showed risk and identity to be inextricably linked. Hence, whereas these researchers chart the biographical narratives of individual young people by conducting several interviews over a ten year period, I considered how different experiences and understandings of risk and social position were brought to bear on focus group conversations in ways that had particular implications for the construction of identities.

In discussing risks, the young people in my study drew upon *both* governmental youth risk discourses *and* an array of identity discourses which inform understandings of age, class, gender and ethnicity. How these discourses were taken-up, negotiated or even resisted was, in turn, informed by their own culturally embedded discourses and interpretative repertoires that provide localised understandings of risk and identity and which are related to the local and social spaces that they inhabit. These material, cultural and discursive factors informed the situated accomplishment of subject positions: young people reflexively and interactively positioned themselves and others

in various ways (Wetherell, 1998, 1999; Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Edley, 2001; Davies and Harré, 1990) in the very process of talking about everyday risk practices. Risks were also routinely used as forms of symbolic capital which expressed and maintained a range of social distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984; Lupton, 1999; Silva and Wright, 2007). These processes were evident in respect of age, gender, ethnic and class identities.

Regarding age, risk practices were often discussed in ways that delineated maturity from immaturity, responsibility from irresponsibility. Across all groups, young people worked to position themselves as mature and responsible. Most disidentified with dominant media representations of risky youth, variously describing these as exaggerated or unrepresentative of young people more generally. Conversely, participants tended to reflexively position themselves as young people who, although acutely aware of a range of risk practices, were responsible enough to know how to avoid or manage these. In this respect, the young people routinely invoked notions of *competency* in positioning themselves as responsible individuals (Henderson et al., 2007). Participants also invariably claimed to have *out-grown* certain risk practices, simultaneously distinguishing themselves from younger people who they positioned as more risky and, hence, immature.

While this form of positioning was evident right across the age spectrum, both the form it took and the sorts of risk practices that were used to mark age-based distinctions varied according to age. Several of the white boys aged 14-15, for example, spoke of fights with boys from other schools, but generally constructed such risks as more common amongst *younger* boys. Similarly, 16-18 year-olds associated

practices such as hanging around in parks or drinking alcohol in public spaces with *younger* teenagers, again positioning themselves as mature and responsible young people who had outgrown such practices. Those aged 19-24 routinely described themselves as having *outgrown* practices associated with drinking and clubbing in Liverpool's city centre, positioning themselves as responsible adults. Certain risk practices were, in this respect, found to be used to mark age-based distinctions, indicating key points of differentiation between the focus group participants and those younger than themselves.

Risks were also discussed in terms that expressed and reasserted gendered identities. There were some overlaps between males' and females' narratives, though the predominant pattern was that risk practices were understood as

marking 'masculine' or 'feminine' subject positions. As such, young people clearly

John: white, middle-class man aged 24.

According to NS-SEG classification and current neighbourhood of residence, John was middle-class. Yet, he had spent much of his life living in an inner-city part of Liverpool. John spoke candidly of his youth, noting that from aged 14 he had been a heavy drinker and had often been involved in gang fights. He went on to claim that he had now abandoned this lifestyle, giving up drink and focusing instead on his career as a cage-fighter.

John was quite scathing of today's youth. For instance, he was adamant that young people often asked for trouble by hanging around in gangs and wearing the same style of clothing. As he put it: *'kids don't help themselves with the way they dress – they ask for trouble in the clothes they wear – they wanna look like scallies'*.

John's narrative was interesting in that it highlighted that, even for somebody who had once engaged in a range of problematised risk practices, his view of 'youth-of-today' was clearly informed by dominant governmental youth risk discourses. This was evidenced by his focus on 'hoodies' and 'tracksuits' and his use of class-based terms popular in news media to denigrate working-class youth in particular. But his account also served to show how understandings of youth risk and risky youth are informed by discourses relating to youth-to-adult transition. By claiming to have outgrown certain youth risks and by condemning those engaging in practices not dissimilar to those he had himself once been involved in, John positioned himself as a more mature, young adult.

What is illustrated here is the close relation between risk and age: not just in terms of differences in the materiality of risk, but also how risks are used discursively in marking points of transition into adulthood.

retained deep investments in traditional understandings of gender (McNay, 1999). For instance, where males spoke of conflicts with other males they typically asserted an ability to look after themselves. Likewise, discussions of alcohol consumption were marked by an emphasis on being able to hold their drink or to be able to prevent themselves from getting too drunk or being sick. Risk practices were, in this sense, mobilised as symbolic markers of a hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1989; Messerschmidt, 1993; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Canaan, 1996; Brown, 2005). Such a positioning was evident regardless of class location, illustrating how gender and class can intersect in complex ways (Messerschmidt, 1993; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Henderson et al., 2007). Even for those young men from black or ethnic minority backgrounds for whom hegemonic status is unattainable (Connell, 1989), the focus remained on practices related to culturally approved forms of masculinity (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002); much stress being placed on being able to fend off assaults from white youth or resist the perceived harassment inflicted by police, teachers or strangers. Indeed, for the most part, in positioning themselves in such terms many of the males also worked to contest or negotiate dominant governmental youth risk discourses by constructing the very practices that these problematise as symbolic of a culturally approved masculinity.

For their part, girls and young women tended to discuss risks in ways that positioned them largely as females accordant with a respectable femininity. Again, the forms this took varied according to interactions of gender with class and ethnicity. Some of the white middle-class females and all of those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds attained respectable femininity either by eliding discussion of practices relating to alcohol consumption, drug-use or sexual behaviour, implicitly suggesting that these

did not feature as part of their everyday lives, or by an outright condemnation of young women who did engage in these. In the case of the latter groups, such positioning was further strengthened by discussing risks in ways informed by understandings of femininity related to their ethnicity.

Working-class girls and those middle-class women living in less affluent areas of Liverpool were, on the other hand, found to contest dominant governmental youth risk discourses by asserting their tendency to engage in excessive drinking or to frequent night-clubs or parties. In this regard, many of these young women seemingly embraced an active, 'girl power' discourse (Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005). Even here, however, reflecting the complexities of young femininities in late modernity (Nayak and Kelhily, 2008), much emphasis was placed on their proclivity for using their immediate friendship networks as a means of ensuring each others' safety when out drinking (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Hey, 2001), while talk of threats of sexual assault or harassment invoked conventional understandings of females being vulnerable in public spaces and places (Pain, 2001; Seabrook and Green, 2004; Green and Singleton, 2006; Winlow and Hall, 2006). In this regard, these women were found to re-work both dominant governmental youth risk discourses *and* feminine subjectivities, traditional forms of respectable femininity being articulated with non-traditional, more active and assertive forms (Measham, 2002; Aapola, Gonick and Harris, 2005; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008).

Certain risk practices were also discussed in ways that contributed to identity work around ethnicity. Practices such as alcohol consumption and drug-use, for instance, were largely absent in the narratives generated by young people from black or

minority ethnic backgrounds: but where they were discussed then stress was placed on these being *white* risks. Such practices were imbued with moral judgements, white youth being interactively positioned as less responsible and inferior on account of their association with such practices. These distinctions were strengthened by constructing white working-class youth as racist or as lacking respect for their elders. Further, drawing on a shared cultural history of racism in Liverpool, many of the black or minority ethnic youths reproduced a racialised geography of risk, distinguishing safe, black neighbourhoods from risky white parts of the city. In doing so, they also marked points of distinction between *who they were* and *who they were not* (Reay and Lucey, 2000), affirming a 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1997/2000) whereby they positioned themselves as socially and culturally excluded outsiders from much of Liverpool.

Subject positioning was further evident with respect to class location. Particularly illuminating was the extent to which certain risk practices were found to be discussed using the language of class (Skeggs, 1997; Holt and Griffin, 2005; Lawler, 2005; Kelhily and Pattman, 2006). This was especially prominent in the risk narratives produced by middle-class youths where terms such as 'chavs', 'gangs' and 'scallies' operated to express and reproduce class-based distinctions, working-class youths being routinely positioned as morally and intellectually inferior. Yet, many of those from working-class backgrounds employed comparable phrases, expressing similar moral judgements of certain members of the working-class whom they associated with criminal or anti-social behaviour in particular. These young people hence sought to position themselves as moral and respectable members of the working-class, disidentifying with notions of the vulgar, irresponsible, working-class youth portrayed

in much news media and other governmental youth risk discourses.

Understandings and experiences of risk were hence found to be closely bound up with identity. Nonetheless, risk narratives were sometimes characterised by dissonances and ambiguities *within* and overlaps *between* different social positions. For instance, while most working-class females claimed to drink on a frequent basis this was not a practice asserted by all. Likewise, although most of the males spoke of risk practices in ways that evoked understandings of a culturally approved masculinity, a small number contested this by claiming *not* to engage in particular risky practices and as actively avoiding conflict with other males. Also, while the majority of those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds referred to racism, this was not an experience shared by all. In this respect, understandings of risk and their relation to identity did exhibit some variation according to differential relationships of class, age, gender and ethnicity. Such dissonances were found to have some implications for how young people positioned themselves and others in processes of conversational interactions. Hence, the specific form that masculine subjectivities took sometimes shifted as specific claims around risk-taking were contested by others. Likewise, females' attempts to position themselves in either traditional modes of femininity or more contemporary forms of active femininity, or indeed complex combinations of both, were produced through interactive processes through which dissonant and consonant risk practices came face-to-face with one another.

The above comments notwithstanding, the overarching theme to emerge was that experiences and understandings of risk were found to have particular implications for

how selves and others were positioned and how various social distinctions were expressed and reproduced.

Research and Policy Implications

As I outlined in Chapter One, traditionally, research into youth and risk focused almost exclusively on the criminal or deviant practices of marginalised sections of the working-class. However, against a backdrop of major social, cultural and economic changes which accord with late modernity and the risk society, the very nature of youth culture has undergone significant changes while many risk practices have become embedded within youth leisure more generally. At the same time, these changes have rendered young people's transitions into adulthood as inherently risky. These shifts have resulted in the necessity for new ways of conceptualising young people and their relationship to risks.

This challenge has, of course, been taken up by numerous researchers who focus on different aspects of the relationship between young people and risk. Those who are grouped together under the umbrella term of post-subcultural studies, for instance, suggest that today's youth cultures are no longer bound by class structure: rather, for these writers, contemporary youth culture is a democratised space in which the significance of traditional informants of youth cultural practices, such as class, gender and ethnicity has diminished and where the only barrier to participation is age (Redhead, 1993; Thornton, 1995; Bennett, A., 1999, 2001; Muggleton, 2000; Bennett, A., and Kahn-Harris, 2004). Risk-taking in this context is associated, not with working-

class resistance or symbolic solutions to material problems, but with hedonistic pleasure and excitement. Other researchers have focused their attention on risks encountered in making transitions into adulthood, pointing to the unequal social distribution of a range of risks and barriers to becoming adult, and the degree of uncertainty and instability that now characterises many young adults' lives (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, 2007; Wyn and White, 1997; Margo et al., 2006). A further strand of research, which is informed largely by Foucault's work on discourse and governmentality, focuses important light on how young people and their practices are problematised through a proliferation of risk discourses which construct them in profoundly negative terms and which subject ever more aspects of their lives to surveillance and regulation (Kelly, 2001; Scraton, 2004; Walton, 2006; Mooney and Young, 2006; Crawford, 2009; McDowell, 2009).

Such investigations into aspects of the relationships between youth, risk and identity have provided many valuable insights. And yet, in many respects, they often leave key aspects of this relationship under-researched. For instance, post-subculturalists typically follow earlier subcultural studies in focusing on the practices of the more spectacular elements of youth culture, paying far less attention to the majority of young people *not* engaged in the melodramatic aspects of youth lifestyle (Miles, 2001; Bunton, Green and Mitchell, 2004; Green and Singleton, 2006; France, 2007). For their part, research concerned with exposing the various discursive regimes in circulation that problematise young people and their practices, rarely pay attention to how young people themselves relate to these discourses, how they understand or experience risks, and how these are linked to the material and cultural contexts of their everyday lives. Likewise, much research into risks associated with youth-to-adult

transitions has focused on the persistence of structural inequalities, illustrating this with reference to a range of statistical data rather than listening to young people's own experiences.

Many of these questions have, however, been investigated by other youth researchers, several of whom have informed my own study. Research that is engaged with young people clearly indicates that how risks are experienced and understood, what role they play in their daily lives, how they are managed, negotiated or avoided, and how attitudes towards them alter over time, are closely related to the different local and social spaces that young people inhabit and the various material, social, cultural and symbolic resources that are available to them (Bunton et al., 2004; Henderson et al., 2007; Nayak and Kelhily, 2008; Thomson, 2011). What is indicated quite starkly in these studies is that, while young people's everyday lifestyles and opportunities have altered in quite profound ways in recent decades, their choices, opinions, values, attitudes and opportunities, including those relating to risks, continue to be enabled or constrained in varying ways according to age, gender, ethnicity, class and neighbourhood. This complex relationship between youth, risk and the various social positions and local spaces that they occupy is clearly demonstrated in my investigation into young people living in Liverpool.

Regarding age, for instance, recent research has shown that many risk practices are deeply intertwined with culturally related understandings of what it means to be adult, attitudes towards risk practices such as alcohol consumption and drug-use, for example, changing as young people progress into adulthood (Northcote, 2006; Jarvinen and Gundlach, 2007; Henderson et al., 2007). This was echoed in my

research. In the course of engaging in focused discussions in which shared experiences and understandings of risk and identity were brought to bear on conversations, everyday risks were not only found to be experienced in different ways according to the age of the person, but also to be mobilised as forms of symbolic capital which marked distinctions between mature and immature, responsible and irresponsible young people. This underpins the necessity of avoiding treating 'youth' as an undifferentiated age category, a tendency present in many studies of young people, and to pay more attention to how experiences and understandings of risk are bound up with transition into adulthood.

Likewise, recent youth studies researchers have shown that while gender relations have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, talking with young people reveals that they often retain deep investments in conventional images of femininity and masculinity (McNay, 1999), albeit in modified forms. Young women, for instance, have been shown to renegotiate their femininities via an active engagement in risk practices more traditionally associated with young men and masculinity while retaining traditional notions of feminine respectability (Measham, 2002). Research which engages with young males shows that many remain wedded to familiar modes of masculinity and continue to associate with risky practices that connote a hegemonic or culturally approved masculinity (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Crawford, 2004). What these studies have shown is that young people's gendered identities are enabled or constrained to varying degrees according to the localised cultural logic of practice (Crawshaw, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007) and the culturally-embedded understandings of acceptable or unacceptable femininity or masculinity which relate to the social and neighbourhood spaces they inhabit (Green and

Singleton, 2006). Again, this is supported by my own research into young people living in Liverpool which found experiences and understandings of risk to be strongly patterned according to gender. As such, my findings underline the need to interrogate more rigorously assertions as to the undoing of gender relations in late modernity (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992), focusing specifically on the extent to which young men and women continue to understand and experience risk in different ways, how their motivations to invest in relatively familiar images of gender are informed by the various material, cultural and symbolic resources associated with the local and social spaces that they inhabit, and how risks are used to mark gender distinctions.

In a similar vein, contrary to claims made by those who suggest that traditional social structures are declining in significance, experiences and understandings of youth risks and risky youth have been shown to remain strongly patterned according to ethnicity (Bennett and Holloway, 2005; Webster, 2009). Also, many neighbourhood spaces continue to be experienced as safe or dangerous along ethnic and 'racial' lines (Pain, 2001; Seabrook and Green, 2004; Ehrkamp, 2008). This was clearly evident in my study which found young people to understand and experience risk in differing ways according to ethnic location and the different material, cultural and symbolic resources available to them. In particular, those from black or minority ethnic backgrounds drew upon a culturally embedded logic of practice that differed in important ways from their white counterparts: risk was understood in terms of racism and practices such as alcohol consumption, drug-use and violent crime were associated very much with primarily white youths. What my findings highlight is that to understand the relationship between youth, risk and identity it is important to pay attention to *how* and *why* certain risk practices relate to ethnicity. This is in respect to

both material experiences of risks *and* how are they used as symbolic capital to express and reproduce ethnic distinctions. Such questions are often asked of black or minority ethnic youths where these sorts of understandings and judgements of youth risks are at their most explicit. But, attention should also be directed towards the often taken-for-granted character of white youths' risk practices and how these are similarly invoked in ethnic identity work.

Claims that class is no longer relevant have also been shown to be overstated. At the material level, a multitude of risk practices remain far more prevalent in the lives of working-class youths (Henderson et al., 2007; Shildrick, Blackman and MacDonald, 2009) while young people continue to be classified and judged via the language of class (Skeggs, 2005; McRobbie, 2009) as has been evidenced by a number of qualitative studies into young people's attitudes towards working-class youth (Holt and Griffin, 2005; Hayward and Yar, 2006; Kelhily and Pattman, 2006; Hollingworth and Williams, 2009). Again, my investigation builds on this research by showing how the risk narratives produced via focus group discussions were informed by class location in a range of important ways. Although some overlap was found between working- and middle-class youth with regard to their respective experiences and understandings of risk, the broader class-based patterns of practice were clearly evident while the language of class was commonplace. What this study reaffirms, therefore, is that a full understanding of the relationship between youth, risk and identity rests on paying due attention, not only to the materiality of risks in young people's lives, but also the various culturally meaningful discourses and class-based logics of practice that are drawn upon in discussing risks. As data from my focus groups shows, these are important in processes of identity work, indicating clearly

that class still matters.

My investigation into the meanings and experiences of risk of young people living in Liverpool therefore makes a valuable contribution to current research in the field of youth studies. In particular, my research underscores the point that to understand the relationship between youth, risk and identity more fully, it is necessary to engage in empirical research that provides young people with a voice. Allowing young people to discuss their experiences and understandings of risk in their own terms provides valuable access to the various material, cultural, social and symbolic resources which shape their values, attitudes and identities (Henderson et al., 2007). As I have shown, understandings and experiences of risk were closely related to the different age, gender, ethnic, class and neighbourhood locations that these young people inhabited. This was evident in focus group discussions where young people drew upon actual encounters with risks experienced in the context of their everyday lives, and discussed these with reference to their culturally embedded understandings of risk and identity. The different culturally informed logics of practice that shaped these discussions were also seen to have a range of implications for the situated accomplishment of identities and for the reproduction of various social distinctions. Further, locating experiences and understandings of risk in their local social and cultural contexts, helped to show the various ways in which young people may identify with, negotiate or contest dominant governmental youth risk discourses.

These findings have implications for both how dominant governmental risk discourses problematise youth, and for issues relating to social policy.

1). In simply castigating youth as 'yobs', 'hoodies', 'chavs', 'binge drinkers', 'lager louts' and 'ladettes' on account of their risk practices and the risks they allegedly pose to society, politicians, health practitioners, media professionals and others run the risk of, at best, over-simplifying the relationship between young people and risk, and at worse, further alienating an already marginalised population. This relationship is infinitely more complex, young people experiencing and understanding risk in a range of ways. As Paul Crawshaw (2004:228) observes in his account of the risk practices of working-class men, 'official discourses which condemn young people's behaviour as irrational and risky are misguided as they fail to comprehend the logic of such practice which are determined by the historically constructed and reconstructed habitus of such a group.' This formulation of the dissonance between governmental youth risk discourses and young people's association with risk should be extended to incorporate the full range of social locations. As such, many forms of risk-taking associated with young people should not simply be constructed as nihilistic and reckless practices; rather, greater attention needs to be paid to young people's own understandings of these and how, in *their* terms, they make sense.

2). Policy makers concerned with youth and risk would be well advised to spend more time listening to young people's own experiences and understandings of risk. Many of the young people in my study asserted that they had both enjoyed the experience of talking of everyday risks, and that they had found the process helpful in that it had made them reflect more closely on aspects of their lifestyle. Indeed, several berated the fact that they were not given similar opportunities within their respective schools. In this respect, asking young people to discuss the risks that matter to them, and to share experiences and concerns with peers, would seem an obvious, though all too

often over-looked, strategy for better understanding the relationship between youth and risk. Certainly, there should be more space for this in initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* which do address some risk practices, but evidently to far too insufficient a degree. Such an approach would also help illuminate young people's own risk management or risk avoidance strategies. Many young people were acutely aware of the risks that they encounter and had devised relatively complex ways of addressing these: this was especially so as regards young women's practices relating to night-time leisure. Tapping into such strategies, which are themselves generated by young people's own experiences and cultural understandings of risk, would again seem to be an obvious and useful way of further developing other young people's competencies in managing or avoiding certain risks.

In conclusion, my study demonstrates how focused discussions revealed broad patterns of consonance between young people's experiences and understandings of risk, the materiality of their everyday lives and social position. Young people who inhabit different material contexts were found to experience and understand risk in different ways. This relationship was in no small measure related to neighbourhood and class, but it was also linked to age, gender and ethnicity. In this respect, the materiality of risk was found to be inextricably bound up with dominant governmental youth risk discourses, identity discourses, and an array of culturally grounded discourses and experiences that provide localised understandings of risk and social position. Further, and importantly, this combination of material, social and symbolic resources were brought to bear on processes of identity work. Particular understandings of risky practices were used by young people in various ways to interactively and reflexively position selves and others and to express and reassert

different social distinctions between individuals and groups. Experiences and understandings of risk were, in other words, not only patterned according to age, gender, ethnicity, class and neighbourhood, but also worked to affirm differences between these different positions.

My research shows, and this is my main contribution to extant knowledge of the field, that there is no simple correspondence between youth, risk and identity. *Youth* is a population with many cleavages: young people live in different neighbourhoods, occupy different positions in social space, encounter different risks and experience and understand risks in multifarious ways. These heterogeneous positions in turn inform the situated accomplishment of subject positions in conversational interactions: they are manifest in complex and on-going processes of negotiating/renegotiating and producing/reproducing subject positions, and in the expression and reassertion of identity distinctions between individuals and groups. In this sense, governmental risk discourses which construct youth risks and problematise youth as a risk-population grossly over-simplify the relationship between youth, risk and identity. Understanding this relationship entails more than simply focusing on youth risks and youth as a social problem; rather, attention also needs to focus on young people's contextually and culturally embedded experiences and understandings of risk and the role that these play in reproducing age, gender, ethnic and class identities.

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1. Focus Group Profile

Focus Group No.	No. in Group	Names	Age	Gender	Ethnicity ¹	NS-SEG ²
1	7	Karen Jo Gill Anne Paula Maureen Kath	19-24	Female	White British	1-3
2	5	John Pete Robbie Carl Mike	19-24	Male	White British	1-3
3	4	Rebecca Hannah Sarah Karen	19-24	Female	White British	1-3
4	6	Zoe Emma Rebecca Leah	16-18	Female	White British	1-3
5	3	Simon Neil Jon	16-18	Male	White British	1-3
6	7	Ashlea Sophie Sara Katrina Gemma Suzanne Jayne	16-18	Female	White British	4-5
7	6	Dean Nathan Jermaine Leroy Joseph Jamilah	16-18	Male	Black-British Black British Nigerian Black British Black British Somalian	4-5
8	7	Peter Daniel David Simon Thomas	14-15	Male	White British	1-3

		Alex John				
9	9	Mark Nathan Martin Liam Sam Sean Jonathon Owen Carl	16-18	Male	White British	1-3
10	8	Dawn Annemarie Kiera Georgina Denise Gemma Kate Jenny	16-18	Female	White British	1-3
11	6	Gary Stuart Adam Craig Harry Jack	14-15	Male	White British	4-5
12	4	Clare Julie Jackie Carla	16-18	Female	White British	4-5
13	4	Antony Nazmi Anwaar Kris	14-15	Male	Black British British Muslim British Muslim Ghanaian	4-5
14	7	Amal Marwa Ruby Laila Nuha Sawada Amaani	14-15	Female	British Muslim Black British African-Portuguese Black British Somalian Somalian British-Asian	4-5
15	5	Hasan Azim Dwight Nwankwo Fadil	16-18	Male	British-Asian Iranian Mixed-ethnicity Nigerian British-Asian	4-5
16	8	Sharnaz Serena Amita Ruksana Anila Raima Asal Surraya	16-18	Female	Bangladeshi-British Mixed-ethnicity British-Asian Black-British British-Caribbean Iranian Brish-Asian Somalian	4-5

1. Participants from BME backgrounds were asked to self-identify their ethnic identity;
2. National Statistics, Socio-economic Group (Office for National Statistics, 2005)

2. Recruitment Letter

Dear colleague

Re: Participation in Research

I am presently conducting research into the lifestyles of young people aged 14-24 who live in the Liverpool area. With this in mind I would be grateful if you would consider volunteering to take part in a focus group interview with 6 or 7 other participants.

The aim of the focus group is to gather data relating to the various activities that characterise the everyday lifestyles of young people and their perceptions of risk. This will involve some discussion of the various activities that you engage in and/or your attitudes towards activities engaged in by other young people. It is anticipated that the focus group will last approximately 1-2 hrs with conversation being recorded using audio-recording equipment if you agree to this. However, anything that you say will be kept anonymous and confidential in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998).

In order to facilitate open and frank discussion the research is to be conducted in accordance with the British Sociological Association's Ethical Guidelines. Anonymity and confidentiality shall be protected throughout the research, while care will be taken to ensure that data is not published in a form that would permit the actual or potential identification of participants without prior written consent. Also, all data shall be stored in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998).

You will not have to discuss any issues with which you feel uncomfortable and you will be able to withdraw your consent to participate further in the research at any time. Also, should you decide to withdraw consent then you will have the right to veto the use of any information that you have provided previous to your withdrawal.

Your participation in this research would be most valuable and it would be greatly appreciated if you would be able to volunteer.

If you are interested in participating in this research please complete the attached Consent Form and return this to me in the envelope provided. Should you require further information regarding this matter please feel free to contact me at the above address. Alternatively, you may contact my Research Supervisors whose details are as follows:

Dr. Helen Lucy Faculty of Social Sciences The Open University Walton Hall Milton Keynes MK 7 6BJ E-Mail: h.lucey@open.ac.uk	Dr. Elizabeth Silva Faculty of Social Sciences The Open University Walton Hall Milton Keynes MK 7 6BJ E-Mail: E.B.Silva@open.ac.uk
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Regards

Dave Merryweather.

3. Consent Form

Your Copy (Please Retain)

Research on Young People's Lifestyles Consent Form.

I (print name) _____ agree to be interviewed as part of the *Young People's Lifestyles* research project. I do so on the understanding that any information I divulge will be treated as confidential and that my identity shall be protected, both during the research process and in any subsequent publications that may arise from this research. I understand that my interview transcripts will not have my name on them and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only myself and the researcher have access. I also understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in the research at any time and that I have the right to veto the use of any information that I have provided.

If you consent to take part in the study, please tick the boxes below and sign the form:

I am between 14 and 24 years of age:

☐

I understand what the project involves, who is doing it and why:

☐

I am prepared to be contacted about coming to a focus group discussion:

☐

I am prepared to have the discussion recorded to assist with transcription:

☐

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Should you wish to contact Dave Merryweather regarding this research you can do so either by phone on 0151 291 3886 or by e-mail on merrywd@hope.ac.uk

Researcher's Copy

I (print name) _____ agree to be interviewed as part of the *Young People's Lifestyles* research project. I do so on *the understanding* that any information I divulge will be treated as confidential and that my identity shall be protected, both during the research process and in any subsequent publications that may arise from this research. I understand that my interview transcripts will not have my name on them and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to which only I and the researcher have access. I also understand that I may withdraw my consent to participate in the research at any time and that I have the right to veto the use of any information that I have provided.

In agreeing to take part in the research I confirm that:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| I am between 14 and 24 years of age: | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand what the project involves, who is doing it and why: | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am prepared to be contacted about coming to a focus group discussion: | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am prepared to have the discussion recorded to assist with transcription: | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Signature: _____ Date: _____

In order to assist with the research I would be grateful if you could provide the following information:

Name.		Contact Details	Tel: E-mail:
Address:			
	Postcode		

Please Tick Relevant Boxes

1. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐ 2. Age (Please state) _____

3. Ethnic Origin: White British: ☐ Black British: ☐ Please State: _____

4. Occupation of the main wage-earner in your household: _____

5. Is this person:
 An employee: ☐ Self-employed with employees: ☐ Self-employed without employees ☐

6. Approximately how many employees are employed in this person's place of work?
 1-24: ☐ 25 or more: ☐ Don't Know: ☐

7. Does this person supervise any other employees?
 Yes ☐ No: ☐ Don't Know: ☐

4. Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

In order to facilitate full and open discussion of aspects of youth lifestyles this focus group is to be conducted in a manner that seeks to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. In this respect before taking part any further in the focus group I would be grateful if you could read and sign the following declaration.

Declaration

In order to ensure that the research is conducted in a manner that preserves the confidentiality and anonymity of ALL participants I (print name) -

_____ agree to abide by the following guidelines:

- That the focus group shall be treated as a 'safe-zone' in which all aspects of youth lifestyles can be discussed without prejudice or fear of recrimination; (1)
- That the views and opinions of all participants shall be treated with respect;
- That I shall not disclose to any third party any information which arises during the course of the focus group interview. (2)
- That I shall not disclose to any third party the identities of those participating in the research.

Signature _____ **Date** _____

Notes:

1. Issues relating to serious criminal activity or which involve harm to persons may be exempt from this proviso;
2. In the event that issues of a distressing nature are discussed you reserve the right to discuss these with a counsellor.